

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (EDD)

Exploring intercultural understanding through home-school communication in an international school

Brinn, Michelle

Award date:
2015

Awarding institution:
University of Bath

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Exploring intercultural understanding through home-school communication in an international school

Michelle Samantha Brinn

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education

University of Bath

Department of Education

May 2015

COPYRIGHT

Attention is drawn to the fact that copyright of this thesis rests with the author. A copy of this thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that they must not copy it or use material from it except as permitted by law or with the consent of the author.

This thesis may be made available for consultation within the University Library and may be photocopied or lent to other libraries for the purposes of consultation with effect from.....

Signed on behalf of the Faculty of Education

Table of contents

Preface	<u>Context for the study</u>	7
	Background to the study	8
Chapter 1	<u>Review of the literature</u>	10
	Introduction	10
	The social and historical context of the EYFS and its implications for practice within international schools	11
	Parental involvement within the EYFS and its implications from international school practitioners	18
	What type of partnership? Scaffolding vs co-construction	25
	Intercultural vs international education	28
	Attempting a more dialogic relationship	32
Chapter 2	<u>Methodology</u>	35
	The development of the research question:	35
	Reflections on past practice and considerations for future	
	Attempting a more dialogic relationship: what next?	39
	The Development of ‘The Learning Journey’ and its role within this research project	41
	Moving the inquiry forward: Theoretical considerations and research design	44
	Ensuring the trustworthiness of the research	47
	Delineating the case	49
	Ethical implications	50
	Research design: A phased approach	52
Chapter 3	<u>Phase One</u>	54
	<u>Gaining the parental perspective : Methodology</u>	
	Data collection	54
	Sample	55
	Maximising participation	57
	The role of the researcher	61
	The issue of power	62
	Parental participation	63
	Data analysis	67
Chapter 4	<u>Phase One</u>	70

	<u>Gaining the parental perspective : The findings</u>	
	Educational perspectives and attitudes towards home-school communication	70
	Practical suggestions and discussion regarding home/ school communication strategies	80
	The interview process	85
	Consideration of other issues	88
Chapter 5	<u>Phase One</u>	90
	<u>Gaining the parental perspective : Discussion</u>	
Chapter 6	<u>Phase Two</u>	95
	<u>Enhancing the potential for co-construction: Methodology</u>	
	Enhancing the potential for co-construction: data collection	95
	Enhancing the potential for co-construction: ethical considerations	96
	Enhancing the potential for co-construction: theoretical considerations	97
	Enhancing the potential for co-construction: practice adaptation	98
	Background to Parent Y	114
Chapter 7	<u>Phase Two</u>	116
	<u>Enhancing the potential for co-construction: Findings</u>	
	Discussion	124
	Beyond Parent Y	126
Chapter 8	<u>Conclusion</u>	129
	The aim of the inquiry	129
	Exploring intercultural understanding within home-school communication in an international school	130
	Developing a theory for future practice	132
	Extending change beyond the classroom	137
	Conclusion	142
References		144
Appendices		154

List of Tables

Table 1	Comparative size of year groups	56
Table 2	Parental Meetings, population and sample.	64
Table 3	Parental Meetings, nationalities of population and sample	64
Table 4	Parental Meetings, makeup of participants	65
Table 5	Parental Meetings, makeup of groups	66
Table 6	Questionnaires: population and sample	66
Table 7	Questionnaires: make up of participants	67
Table 8	Home-school communication tools used within the Pre- Nursery	99
Table 9	Comparative analysis of home-school communication received during the study year	114
Table 10	Comparison of e mail communication between home and school	115

List of Figures

Figure 1	Extract from Welcome Booklet (2009)	100
Figure 2	Extract from Open Morning table card	101
Figure 3	Example of questions used in outdoor learning trail	101
Figure 4	Extract from discussion booklet produced as feedback from workshops	102
Figure 5	Example of Blog post	105
Figure 6	Example of Blog post	106
Figure 7	Assessment grid for Pre- Nursery (2009)	107
Figure 8	Revised planning and assessment grid for Pre- Nursery (Excerpt)	109
Figure 9	Example of procedural notice commonly used in Red Book	110
Figure 10	Excerpt from review of Learning Journey meeting	111
Figure 11	Example of page from Learning Journey	119
Figure 12	Excerpt from Physical Development: moving and handling	139

Acknowledgements

In loving memory of my parents Kenneth and Shirley Brinn, without whom none of this would have happened. You are dearly missed. Thank you also to my husband and daughter who have quietly put up with me throughout.

Abbreviations

CIS - Council of International Schools
CPD - Continuing Professional Development
EAL - English as an Additional Language
EPPE - Project - Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project
EY - Early Years
EYFS - Early Years Foundation Stage
FS - Foundation Stage
HLE - Home Learning Environment
IB - International Baccalaureate
LJ – Learning Journey
NCB – National Children’s Bureau
NEASC - New England Association of Schools and Colleges
PTG – Parent Teacher Group
PEAL - Parents, Early Years and Learning
PEEP - Peers Early Education Partnership
SES – Socio Economic Status
SLT - Senior Leadership Team
TA - Teaching Assistant
UK – United Kingdom
ZPD - Zone of Proximal Development

Abstract

This inquiry was prompted by a desire to understand ‘partnership working’ (DfE, 2012, p.3) with the diverse parental body of a British International School Pre-Nursery based in Bangkok. It was hypothesised that this necessitated the co-construction of a shared understanding between home and school about a child’s learning. Nonetheless, the manner in which this could be achieved was unclear. Consequently, an explorative case study was instigated to gain a greater understanding of home-school interactions within this context. Influenced by Early Years policy and literature, as well as concepts of dialogue and interculturalism, it was hypothesised that involving parents within the redevelopment of a reporting and assessment tool may support the co-construction of a shared understanding about the child as a learner. Accordingly, a series of parental meetings were organised to elicit parental views. The parental meetings were illuminating and prompted the adaptation of a range of tools and artefacts to scaffold parents into a greater understanding of Pre-Nursery pedagogy and to engage them in a learning dialogue with school. At the completion of the study, evidence indicated that the development of a shared understanding between home and school had been achieved. This suggested that integrating conceptions of scaffolding and co-construction within home-school communication enhanced the potential for partnership working. Nonetheless, the complexities of engaging with the diverse parental body found within international education were also highlighted. In addition, the inquiry highlighted the difficulties of sustaining and extending practice innovations. It was concluded that further research may be necessary to fully understand partnership working within this context and to develop the consistent whole school approach deemed necessary to support its implementation.

Preface

Context for the study

The context of this study is a large ‘British’ international school catering for 2,100 pupils aged 18 months to 18 years, situated on the outskirts of Bangkok, Thailand. It employs teachers from a wide range of countries including Britain, other European countries, America, Australia and New Zealand. Thai nationals are also employed, but rarely as classroom teachers, the exception being within the Thai Department itself wherein Thai language and culture are taught. Most of the Thai nationals within the school are employed as Teaching Assistants (TAs), Sports Coaches, Academic Support staff, Administrative staff and General Support staff.

The school is typical of many older established international schools, in that it was started by an ex-patriate parent eager to provide a primary education for her children (Harding and Measures, 2007). For many years the school remained a small institution catering mainly for European (predominantly British) ex-patriate families looking for an alternative to boarding school in their respective home countries. The likelihood of relocation to a third country remained high and thus the school adopted a curriculum based upon that of the UK to ease transfer between this and other British curriculum schools. However, the growing demand for an ‘international’ education and the relaxation of laws that previously prohibited Thai nationals from attending international schools led to a growth in the size and diversity of the student body. The school still classes itself as a British international school as it follows the English National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) from the Foundation Stage until Year 11 whereupon the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IBO, 2013) is taught. The school is accredited by globally recognised international school bodies such as Council of International Schools (CIS) and New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and is an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School.

The focus of this study is the Pre-Nursery which is situated within the school’s Foundation Stage (FS) Unit. This unit is relatively large with the capacity for 250 students from age 1.5 – 5.5 years in half or full day provision. It is housed in a separate building with its own garden within the wider school grounds. The children within the FS come from a range of

international backgrounds; currently the school contains students from 65 different countries. At the time of the study, the FS was organised hierarchically according to the child's age and contained a Playgroup for children aged over 18 months, two Pre -Nursery classes for children aged 2.5 – 3.5 years, three Nursery classes (3.5 – 4.5) and five Reception classes (4.5- 5.5). Employed within the FS were 10 expatriate Class Teachers, predominantly from the UK, fourteen Teaching Assistants (all of whom were Thai nationals and fully qualified teachers in Thailand, holding either Bachelors or Masters degrees in Education), six English as an Additional Language (EAL) instructors (all of whom held Bachelors degrees) and a range of other qualified teaching staff including Learning Support specialists, music specialists and sports specialists.

The parental body within international education can be extremely diverse (Hayden, 2006). Nonetheless, it could be argued that they fit Desforges with Abouchaar (2003) criteria of parents more liable to become involved within their child's education; they are affluent, most likely highly educated (Hayden, 2006) and their choice of one of the more expensive fee paying schools in Bangkok suggests that they value education. Nonetheless, great discrepancies in parental involvement were noted by Pre-Nursery staff. Accordingly, ways were sought to further understand parental involvement and home-school interactions within the setting; this study is a consequence of this initial desire.

Background to the study

A fervent interest in home - school interaction within international education first began when my teaching colleague and I noticed vastly differing expectations between home and school regarding young children's independence. Within the Pre-Nursery for example, children were expected to eat, dress and use the toilet without help. Although in keeping with UK expectations (EYFS, DfE, 2012), many of the 2.5 year old children joining the class were used to a very high degree of adult assistance within all these tasks. Subsequently, the differing expectations of home and school caused some children anxiety and distress. Potential cultural differences aside, these differing expectations were exacerbated by the almost universal trend within our parental body of employing a domestic worker or maid

(usually from the host or even a third country) to look after the children; a phenomenon noted by Bradley (2010) and Lutz (2002) as growing in many regions of the world.

To alleviate possible anxiety for our children, dialogue and information sharing between home and school was seen as beneficial. Consequently, in conjunction with the school's Speech and Language Therapist and Senior Teacher for Early Years, a series of interactive workshops entitled 'Developing Independence in the Early Years', were instigated. The workshops were split into two separate sessions, the first being presented in English and offered to parents, the second presented in Thai and offered to nannies. The aim of the workshops was to engage parents and nannies in a dialogue about the expectations within the FS; the hope being that a change in parental and nanny perception regarding independence within very young children would result.

It was understood that, although potentially responsible for most of the day-to-day care of the children, the nannies might be powerless to affect change without the support of the parents. Thus, within the parental workshops discussion topics and video clips for the subsequent nanny workshops were outlined for parental approval. Furthermore, within the nanny workshops it was constantly reiterated that the information provided should, first and foremost, form the basis of discussion between nanny and employer. To support conversation, two copies of detailed bilingual feedback were provided to each attending family. Whilst maintaining individual anonymity, this feedback outlined the dialogue within the nanny workshop. Although not naïve enough to think that a workshop would assuage all the issues of children's 'learned helplessness' (Hayden, 2006, p.48) associated with an overreliance on domestic help, it was hoped that it might encourage slight changes in attitude and behaviour to support the transition into schooling. Nonetheless, despite being carefully planned, very well attended, receiving incredibly positive feedback and repeated annually over a period of four years (with many of the same nannies and families attending) the workshops appeared to produce almost no noticeable change in either attitude or behaviour regarding children's independence. Theoretical contemplation on this experience led to the instigation of the research project under discussion.

Chapter One

Review of the literature

Introduction

It has long been recognised that cross over and cohesion between home and school learning practices can enrich a young child's learning (Donaldson, 1978; Melhuish et al, 2008; Harris and Goodall, 2008). Furthermore, the view that a child's parents are their first and foremost educators is an oft repeated refrain within Early Years literature (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000; Pugh, cited in ELPPEG, 2010; PEAL, 2007; Tickell, 2011). Consequently effective interaction between home and school is seen as crucial to successful learning (DfE, 2012). Nonetheless, differing conceptions of the role and purpose of home-school interaction may exist (Harris and Goodall, 2008). Fully understanding home-school interaction within any particular setting may ensure its consistent use within that setting; consistency being noted as central to its overall efficacy (Goodall et al, 2011). The impetus behind this research was a desire to understand and explore the nature of home-school interactions within the Pre-Nursery class of a large British International School in South East Asia.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Guidance (DfE, 2012) currently shapes early years education within the UK. The international institution at the basis of this research describes itself as a 'British International School'. Although not legally bound to follow British Educational Policy, it is common practice within institutions providing a particular form of national education within a different host country (Hayden, 2006) to closely adhere to policy changes within the originating country. There may be many reasons for this, including the need to attract custom in the competitive international school market place outlined by MacDonald (2006). Consequently, the EYFS remains the basis of the curriculum within the Foundation Stage. Within the EYFS parental involvement is a central tenet. Upon closer inspection, however, complexities within the 'parental partnerships' (DfE, 2012, p.3) advocated within the EYFS are revealed. It may be that these complexities are due to the specific historical context within which the EYFS was formed. Utilising Jordan (2004) it is postulated that the nature of the partnership underlying the EYFS is one wherein the practitioner scaffolds the parent towards a pre-defined end, in this case a home learning environment (HLE) (Evangelou et al, 2009; Melhuish et al, 2008) of sufficient quality to

support learning. Although a valued form of home-school interaction, this form of partnership has certain implications (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000), especially within international schools wherein high levels of diversity increase the likelihood of parents and professionals holding different, but potentially equally valid, viewpoints on what constitutes quality within home learning.

To elucidate this viewpoint, this discussion will begin with a brief analysis of the EYFS. The resultant implications for home-school interaction will be outlined, with particular emphasis on their significance for international school practitioners. A hypothesis will be put forth that distinguishing between the scaffolding as opposed to the co-construction of meaning (Jordan, 2004) may illuminate difficulties within ‘partnership working’ (DfE, 2012, p.3). Links will be drawn to educationalists who advocate a paradigm shift from international to intercultural education. The potential for effective intercultural engagement between home and school through the co-construction of meaning will be examined and the complexities of an individual practitioner attempting co-construction will be briefly explored.

The social and historical context of the EYFS and its implications for practice within international schools

The EYFS (DfE, 2012) was developed as part of a wider social agenda within a particular context. Thus, it could be argued that one cannot fully understand this framework without a brief analysis of that context. This premise owes much to the influence of Vygotskian socio cultural/historical theory (Daniels, 2001; Engestrom, 2001; Kozulin, 1998; Wertsch, 1985; Yamazumi, 2006). Its purpose within this discussion is to help illuminate the particular form of parental partnership advocated within the ‘governing principles’ (Popkewitz, 1998, p.560) underlying the statutory guidance and thus elucidate any specific implications for practice.

The current EYFS (revised and published by the Department for Education in March 2012) replaced the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Guidance (DCSF, 2008) which itself replaced and amalgamated the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (DfEE/

QCA , 2000) and the Birth to Three Matters (DfES/Sure Start, 2002) framework for practice. The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (DfEE/ QCA, 2000) supplemented the Early Learning Goals (QCA, 1999) and replaced the Desirable Outcomes in the Early Years document (SCAA, 1996).

The aim of the EYFS is to bring ‘quality and consistency’ (DfE, 2012 p.3) to a historically diverse range of public and private EY provision, the correlation between the quality of any provision and the level of positive outcomes for the child having become a central tenet of Early Childhood Education (Sylva et al, 2004a and b; Sylva and Pugh, 2005; Melhuish et al., 2008; Tickell, 2011; Evangelou et al, 2009)

The EYFS, states its aims thus:

*Every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential. Children develop quickly in the early years and a child’s experiences between birth and age five have a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right. **Good parenting and high quality early learning** together provide the foundation children need to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up. (DfE, 2012, p.3)*

Emphasis added

Due to historical concerns regarding consistency and quality assurance (Pugh, 1992) it is seen as essential that quality is maintained and regulated across the sector:

II. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe.

III. The EYFS seeks to provide:

- **quality and consistency** in all early years settings, ... (DfE, 2012, p. 3)

Thus within the EYFS, a successful preschool experience is seen as being dependent upon the *quality* of that experience. Furthermore, the notion that quality itself can be standardised and regulated through policy implementation (DfE, 2012, p.3) is accepted as unproblematic. Moss et al (2000) disagree. They note that the standardisation of quality is a socially constructed concept, firmly placed within the modernist desire to create order through universal values and as such denies the validity of complexity and multiplicity. Ball (2010) and Bradbury (2013) outline similar concerns, arguing that the image of a successful learner defined within the EYFS reflect a particular neo liberalist view of education and thus fail to illustrate the complexities underlying learning. For Moss et al, (2000) multiplicity within the concept of quality should be embraced rather than rejected. They argue that this can be achieved through the active participation of all stakeholders through a process of joint meaning making.

For Siraj- Blatchford and Wong (1999), however, this relativistic approach to quality is flawed. They argue that such an approach would be dependent upon a high level of civic participation, may be difficult to sustain and would be open to a high degree of fluctuation in views. Furthermore, ‘without recognised external quality standards, practice may be compromised and poor standards may be tolerated’ (p.14). They argue that cross cultural research has identified ‘broad aspects of provision and practice’ (p.16) that facilitate learning and remain constant even when knowledge content varies. Consequently, rather than a completely relativistic solution:

...it is necessary for research to make the curriculum goals, and pedagogic principles of early childhood education explicit. By doing so, stakeholders in each society can decide for themselves, after reflecting on their own priorities for children, which goals, principles and practices to adopt, discard or modify. (p.16).

There is evidence to suggest that the notion of quality outlined within the EYFS is influenced by both these perspectives. Discussing ‘Birth to Three Matters’ – a precursor to the EYFS, Langston and Abbott (2005) outline the reconciliation of ‘these dichotomous positions’ (p.

68) through a process of organisational evaluations involving all stakeholders that would be both internally and externally validated and would recognise that the concept of quality may ‘change as new information emerges’ (p.77). Furthermore, in the literature surrounding the revised EYFS, multiplicity within children’s experiences is clearly recognised. Tickell (2011, p. 85, citing Evangelou et al, 2009, p.23), for example, describe children’s learning as ‘arising from the interplay between the “inter-connected and dynamic facets of the unique child with surrounding relationships and experiences”’. Tickell continues noting: ‘Children’s learning and development from birth to five occurs as the result of a complex interaction between the child and her/his experiences within relationships, and in the environment’ (Tickell, 2011, pp.85-6). It appears then, that children learn through their active participation within interpersonal interactions within a particular context. This concept clearly recognises multiplicity and is reflected within the ‘overarching principles’ (DfE, 2012, p.3) in the EYFS wherein the role of the *relationships* between the child (who is already seen as a competent learner), the supporting adult/s (which would include the caregivers), the environment and the learning (including those between knowledge content) is emphasised.

Nonetheless, alongside these overarching principles there remain the ‘learning and development requirements’ (DfE, 2012, p.3) against which all children must be assessed.

*IV. The EYFS specifies requirements for learning and development The **learning and development requirements** cover:*

- *the areas of learning and development which must shape activities and experiences (educational programmes) for children in all early years settings;*
 - *the early learning goals that providers must help children work towards (the knowledge, skills and understanding children should have at the end of the academic year in which they turn five); and*
 - *assessment arrangements for measuring progress (and requirements for reporting to parents and/or carers).*
- (DfE, 2012, p.3)*

Thus within the EYFS, the curricula aims, pedagogy and criteria for evaluation are also made clear, as Siraj- Blatchford and Wong (1999) suggest and so perhaps the 'dichotomous positions' outlined by Langston and Abbott (2005, p.68) truly are brought together. However, one could argue that there remain inherent tensions in translating the more individualised and contextually bound practice found within the 'overarching principles' (DfE, 2012, p.3) into learning and development goals that apply across an extremely diverse range of settings. Moss (2007) concurs, stating that to do so 'sets up a binary opposition between process and outcome' (p.230) and in Bradbury's view could 'set some children on paths of educational failure when they have only just begun to learn' (2013, p.17).

This tension could lead to difficulties for practitioners. Take, for example the statement on page 6 of the EYFS (2012) that, 'Practitioners must respond to each child's emerging needs and interests, guiding their development through warm, positive interaction'. Siraj- Blatchford et al (2008) note that within high quality pedagogical practice this becomes a process of 'sustained shared thinking' (p.26); a concept central to the literature surrounding the EYFS, (David et al, 2003; Evangelou et al, 2009; The British Association for Early Education, 2012). An examination of the Birth to Three Matters Literature Review (David et al, 2003) and the more recent literature review undertaken by Evangelou et al (2009) indicate that sustained shared thinking may have a 'dialogic' basis (Skidmore, 2006, p. 503). Originating within the work of Bakhtin, the term dialogic indicates a crucial reciprocity within the interaction, wherein meaning comes into existence only when the voice of the listener responds to the voice of a speaker. Operating within a social milieu of many voices, the outcome of this interaction may be the jointly constructed 'hybridization' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.358) of meaning by participants. Accordingly, sustained shared thinking could be described as an attempt to co-operatively construct meaning (Moss, 2007; Wells, 1986; Jordan, 2004) out of the shared utterances made by participants (whether spoken or supported by non- verbal elements). Nonetheless, undertaking sustained shared thinking within the EYFS may not be a straightforward process.

Jordan (2004) states that the negotiation of meaning central to the co-construction of knowledge necessitates empowering children through the exploration and validation of their knowledge and ideas. She continues, 'In contrast to scaffolding, the language of co-

construction of learning generally has no prescribed content outcomes (the teacher has no specific direction of learning in mind); the focus is on developing shared meanings / intersubjectivity, each participant contributing to the on-going learning experience from their own expertise and points of view (2004, p.42). Similarly, Tickell notes that ‘When working with young children, the exchange between adults and children should be fluid, moving interchangeably between activities initiated by children and adult responses.....The provision of meaningful interaction between adults and children to guide new learning ...(being) an essential element of the EYFS’ (2011, p.29). If this is the case then (echoing Moss, 2007 and Bradbury, 2013) definitively outlining the necessary learning to be achieved through this highly contextualised process may compromise the process, the outcome or both.

Admittedly, experienced practitioners fully conversant with the distinctions outlined by Jordan (2004) may be able to help the ‘unique child’ (DfE, 2012, p.3) forge their own path through the learning and development requirements; their store of knowledge allowing them to pick and choose from a vast range of responses, both verbal and organisational. Jordan (2004) concurs noting, ‘In practice teachers who have access to the full range of skills move flexibly between those of scaffolding and those of co-constructing learning’ (p.42). Nonetheless, this tension between the process of sustained shared thinking and learning and development requirements that all EY providers must by law deliver (DfE, 2012 p.2) may place undue pressure on EY practitioners (Moylett and Djemli, 2005). This may be of crucial importance within international schools, wherein market pressure necessitate that pupil achievement is clearly defined and visible to fee paying parents, but where practitioners are divorced from the supportive network of specialist EY advisors and EYFS training available within the UK. The potential consequence being to tip the pedagogical balance towards a more didactic teaching approach at the expense of the process of sustained shared thinking.

Practitioner dilemma regarding the integration of a unique process with a defined outcome emerges many times within the review of the 2008 EYFS statutory framework, undertaken by Dame Tickell (2011). Tickell acknowledges that whilst the overall principles underlying the EYFS have been warmly welcomed by UK practitioners, difficulties in delivering the learning and development requirements have occurred. However, these difficulties are seen

by Tickell as resulting either from the nature of the particular provision (being either part time or framed by a differing educational philosophy) or as a result of the document containing too much developmental information. Tickell's response to this dilemma is twofold. Firstly, the EYFS is slimmed down through the amalgamation and reorganisation of the content into three distinct types of learning; learning characteristics, prime learning areas (which are regarded as universal developmental steps) and specific learning areas (which are more culturally based) (DfE, 2012). Secondly, Tickell recommends that it be made easier for independent schools to opt out of the EYFS. The distinction between prime and specific areas of learning could be helpful to teachers working in diverse contexts *if* cultural differences could truly be responded to. If not the tension of integrating sustained shared thinking with a pre-defined developmental outcome remains. Furthermore, the second response implies that, although recognising the unique child, the EYFS is unable to cater for the learning needs of all parents and children. This acknowledgement in particular has potentially worrying implications for international school teachers.

Returning to the historical development of the EYFS, the need to bring consistency to disparate provision (as outlined by Pugh, 1992) could underlie the tensions discussed above. Tickell partially acknowledges this, whilst at the same time admitting that the sector may not be ready to thrive without the EYFS:

I believe that we have yet to reach a point where the skills and capacities of the early year's workforce have developed far enough for greater self-regulation to become viable. Until that point is reached, a framework applying to all providers in the early years sector offers the promise of greater consistency and continuity for children, and their parents and carers, and stronger partnership and professionalism for practitionersThat said, I believe that there will come a point soon when the early years sector is indeed ready to offer more of its own assurances about quality. (2011, pp.13-14)

To achieve this aim Tickell reflects the conclusions of the influential Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008) and states that knowledgeable and skilled practitioners are essential, noting ‘the need to prioritise the continuing professional development (CPD) of the early year’s workforce’. (Tickell, 2011, p.42)

For those wishing to emphasise the multiplicity of childhood experience, this is a positive acknowledgement, but may again be a crucial point of concern for EY practitioners working within international schools. Removed from the supporting structures and training within the UK, successfully responding to the unique child and adopting a more responsive approach to quality could be extremely difficult. Unless specific CPD providers are employed from the UK, international schools teachers only have access to policies and their supporting documents as electronic or hard copy ‘texts’. For Ball (1993) policy ‘texts’ are never static or possess a single interpretation but are capable of multiple re-interpretation, each ultimately dependent on the unique socio/historical context of the interpreter. In the case of international school practitioners, the EYFS can only be decoded and ‘reconstructed’ (Ball, 1993) within a context far- removed from its inception. Subsequently, the differing pressures on teachers within a fee-paying, international schools may lead to a less responsive ‘misinterpretation’ (Yamazumi, 2006) of the EYFS, with implications for interactions between practitioner and child and also between practitioner and parent.

Parental involvement within the EYFS and its implications for international school practitioners

Within the literature underlying the EYFS, Tickell (2011) and Evangelou et al (2009) note that the family, in whatever shape or form that may take, necessarily plays a central role in young children’s learning. This is reflected in much EY literature wherein the concept that ‘parents are the first and most enduring educators of their children’ is oft repeated (Pugh, cited in ELPPEG, 2010; PEAL, 2007; Tickell, 2011). Subsequently, within the Tickell Review and the EYFS, developing a positive relationship with parents and caregivers is seen as essential:

*The most important influences on children's early development are those that come from home..... and it is therefore very important that the EYFS is accessible and understandable to parents and carers, recognising the importance of practitioners working in **partnership** with them. (Tickell, 2011, p.8)*

*I would particularly like to see parents and carers more involved and working in **close partnership** with practitioners. Therefore, I recommend that the Government increases the emphasis within the EYFS on the role of parents and carers as **partners** in their children's learning.... (Tickell, 2011, p. 17)*

The EYFS seeks to provide:

*...**partnership** working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers; (DfE, 2012, p.3) (Emphasis added)*

It can be argued that implied within the term 'partnership' is the notion of a responsive relationship based upon valuing contributions from all participants. Goodall et al (2011) concur noting:

Schools which successfully engage parents make use of a broad understanding of parental engagement, and their parental engagement strategies accord with the interpretations and values of the parents they are aimed at..... Equally the transfer of knowledge and understanding (is)part of a two way process: not only from school to home but from home to school.(p.5)

To encourage 'partnership working' (DfE, 2012, p.3) within the UK, many government funded initiatives have emerged. One such initiative is the Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL) project. On their web site home page, PEAL echoes the sentiments of the EYFS when they state:

Supporting parents' engagement in their children's learning is an effective way to make a difference to children's lives and outcomes.PEAL is based onauthentic relationships, communication and partnership. (<http://www.peal.org.uk/>, accessed July 8th 2014)

The literature produced by PEAL, the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and the more recently formed Early Learning Partnership Parental Engagement Group (ELPPEG , formed in 2009) all advocate a reciprocal relationship with parents/caregivers. Within their principles for engaging with parents, the ELPPEG note the necessity for professionals to value, listen to, respect and also *learn* from the contributions of the family (ELPPEG, 2010, p.3). Whilst an admirable intention, there may remain a tension within this proposal which relates both to the elusive concept of quality discussed above and the subtle, but potentially crucial, difference between the scaffolding as opposed to the co-construction of knowledge (Jordan, 2004).

Within EY literature, running alongside the notion that parents are the 'first and most enduring educators of their children' (Pugh, cited in ELPPEG, 2010; PEAL, 2007; Tickell, 2011) remains the concept that the *quality* of a child's pre-school experience, including within the Home Learning Environment (HLE) influences subsequent learning (Melhuish et al, 2008; Evangelou et al, 2009; Tickell, 2011; Wheeler and Connor, 2009; DfE, 2012 to name but a few). In a paper utilised by Evangelou et al (2009) and thus Dame Tickell, Desforges with Abouchaar (2003) note that parental involvement 'has a significant positive effect on children's achievement' (p.4). However, not all parents are equally involved:

Differences between parents in their levels of involvement are associated with social class, poverty, health, as well as with parents' perceptions of their role, their levels of confidence in that role and professionals' respect for their role. (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003, p.5)

Influenced by these and other similar findings, Evangelou et al (2009) conclude, 'The HLE characteristics vary with social class, and families from disadvantaged and some ethnic minority groups have lower scores on it (p.5). Melhuish et al (2008, pp.96-7) concur noting:

Parenting varies with SES.The argument linking low SES to lack of stimulation and lower cognitive development has a long history and has regularly been supported by evidence (e.g., Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo and Coll, 2001; Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, and Aber 1997).

It could be argued that the correlation between the quality of the HLE and parental SES (especially poverty) has, like the correlation between the quality of a preschool setting and positive outcomes for the child, become commonly accepted within the UK. This acceptance has a number of unforeseen consequences for parental engagement which affect all practitioners, including those working within international schools. However without adequate analysis, these implications may remain undetected.

Of particular importance to this discussion are the underlying aims of much EY research and subsequent initiatives within the UK (for example, the EPPE project, PEAL, NCB, and Sure Start). This research forms the social and academic milieu within which the EYFS was formed and thus may be crucial to understanding parental involvement within the EYFS. For example, in the highly influential piece of longitudinal research, the EPPE project, the second out of their six stated aims was to investigate the impact of pre-school experience on reducing social inequality (Sylva et al, 2004a). This desire to reduce social inequality is an aim shared with many of the organisations or initiatives noted above. The NCB, for example, have as

their stated aims, to ‘challenge disadvantage in childhood’ (Wheeler and Connor, 2009, p.2) and the ELPPEG aims ‘to “narrow the gap” to improve the life chances of poor children’ (ELPPEG, 2010, p.6). These aims are recognised by EY specialists worldwide, Katz and Valentine (2009) writing in Australia, note: ‘The UK initiative Sure Start is probably the most ambitious attempt of any government to improve the outcomes of children living in disadvantaged areas’ (p.1). The desire to alleviate social disadvantage through early intervention and the noted correlation between SES and the quality of the HLE may have consequences for the nature of the parental partnership advocated within the EYFS.

It could be argued that, whilst recognising the existence of good quality HLEs, the research and initiatives influencing the EYFS have been developed to encourage the emergence of a high quality HLE where it previously did not exist. Evidence for this hypothesis can be found within the many references to practitioners assisting parents. For example, the ELPPEG state the desire to ‘help parents to support their children’s innate readiness to learn’ (2010, p.4). Wheeler and Conner (2009, p.5) discussing PEAL note, ‘The aim of this programme is to support practitioners in developing work to engage parents in their children’s learning.’ Even within the EYFS, the importance of assisting parents is highlighted, ‘Practitioners must discuss with parents and/or carers how the summary of development can be used to support learning at home’ (DfE, 2012, p.9). It could be argued that this view of parental engagement, places the practitioner firmly in the role of ‘knowledgeable expert’ (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000, p.250). Thus it appears that a central tenet of parental engagement within the EYFS is that practitioners extend their influence beyond the setting to enhance the learning relationship between parents and children within the home.

Whilst recognising the potential benefits for many young children, this recurring notion of assistance sits uncomfortably with the concept of a partnership. Discussing similar initiatives in New Zealand, Hughes and MacNaughton note:

Parent–child relationships are increasingly bureaucratised and regulated by government programmes. For example ... Parents As First Teachers (PAFT) programme run by New Zealand’s Early Childhood Development department

.....simultaneously celebrates parents as teachers and subordinates parental knowledge to professional knowledge. It calls parents 'first and most important', but promises them 'guidance' on how to teach their children. (2000, p.250)

However, alongside the many references to supporting parents, there are those that recognise the validity of family practices and the knowledge held by families regarding their children. (See ELPPEG, 2010, p.3, Goodall et al, 2011 p.5 and Whalley, 2007). On page 10 of the EYFS it clearly states, 'In their interactions with children, practitioners should respond to their own day to day observations about children's progress and observation that parents and carers share' (DfE, 2012). Furthermore, within the accompanying non-statutory guidance recommended by Dame Tickell called 'Development Matters' (The British Association for Early Childhood Education, 2012), practitioners are explicitly advised to seek information from parents to enhance their professional practice. Nonetheless, it could be argued that the advice sought (to clarify potential differences in eating habits, bedtime routines, known nursery rhymes/ stories or mathematical terminology - See pages 8, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, 19, 25, 26, 29, 32, 36) is that which can be easily assimilated into the professional discourse of the practitioner. Hughes and MacNaughton, note:

Under the guise of creating collaboration between parents and teachers, this creates a hierarchy between them by posing parental knowledge as supplementary to professional knowledge and by giving staff a right to know a family's child-rearing practices....Since parental knowledge is merely supplementary, staff can ignore it without compromising their professional standards – and they do. (2000, p.245)

For Hughes and MacNaughton (2000) this is not an explicit attempt by practitioners to undermine the role of the parents, but a consequence of the inherent tension in the very

notion of parental involvement, especially parental ‘partnership’. Marsico et al (2013) in their research into the social rituals surrounding secondary school parents’ evenings found three distinct responses from parents to teacher communications. These they classed acquiescence, alliance or conflict. It could be argued that, in order to retain any form of professional status, practitioners must seek acquiescence or alliance within parental engagement. To engage with or recognise the validity of any form of conflict may undermine their status as a professional and therefore their very position. Hughes and MacNaughton, (2000) note that it is the implicit recognition of this dilemma that leaves practitioners as *professionals* to compartmentalise parental offerings as supplemental rather than central to the learning dialogue. However to continue compartmentalising parental contributions may make it difficult to establish more responsive interactions with parents/caregivers (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000), or to explore in conjunction with parents differing notions of an effective HLE (Whalley, 2007). This is especially important when engaging with parents whose views of education may differ from those of the practitioner and thus may be crucial for international school educators.

At this juncture, it must be noted that the aim of this discussion is not to undermine professional expertise or to suggest the existence of complete relativism in learning practices, but to illustrate that the full complexity of engaging in parental *partnerships* is not being discussed with practitioners, a point noted by O’Gorman and Ailwood (2012). This could leave practitioners in an unenviable position, unable to satisfy either policy makers, setting management or the parental body.

To return to the EYFS, it may be that the tension at its heart limits the possibilities of home-school interaction. This is most clearly seen in the case of parents who consciously choose settings with educational philosophies that differ from the EYFS learning and development requirements (Steiner Waldorf Education for example). At present, rather than enter into a relationship with those parents, the solution appears to be an ‘opt out’ clause, wherein exemption from the EYFS is made easier for independent schools (Tickell, 2011, p.56). For Siraj-Blatchford and Wong (1999) this may not be an issue, as the parents of independent

schools are simply enacting their right to decide whether or not a particular curriculum is correct for them. However, leaving aside the debates surrounding educational choice, whilst such a clause remains, policy makers and practitioners need never actively engage with diverse parents to reflect upon differing notions of quality within HLEs or the EYFS. Thus the hoped for dynamism within the concept of quality outlined by Langston and Abbott (2005) may never emerge. For practitioners within international schools this may have important implications, as finding ways to engage with diverse parents holding widely differing conceptions of education may be essential.

In order to understand the needs of international school practitioners one has to understand the nature of the international school parental body. Hayden (2006) notes that international education is a phenomenon that is very difficult to define or categorise due to the vast array of schools and institutions that claim to provide an ‘international’ education. This diversity is equally reflected within the parental body (Mackenzie et al, 2001), though for the most part they are well educated (Hayden, 2006). Thus, it is crucial that international school practitioners find a way to engage with a diverse range of parents that may already provide a good quality HLE, but could hold views on pedagogy that differ from their own. To support this endeavour a detailed examination of the distinction between *scaffolding* and *co-construction* may be advantageous.

What type of partnership? Scaffolding vs co-construction

Analysing the distinction between scaffolding, as opposed to the co-construction of meaning (Jordan, 2004) may encourage a greater understanding of parental interactions. Jordan notes that both terms are drawn from the theories of Vygotsky and refer to the types of interactions that assist a child within the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1962). Although these terms most commonly refer to the relationship between practitioner and child, interesting parallels can be drawn to the relationship between practitioner and parent/caregiver. For Jordan (2004) a clear distinction can be made between differing interactions within the ZPD, a point also made by Cancemi (2009). For Jordan, within the

notion of scaffolding, power and control rests mainly with the more experienced adult, who creates a supporting structure that allows the less experienced participant (in Jordan's discussion this would be the child but in ours this could also refer to the parent/ care-giver) to gradually gain understanding and competence. Within this metaphor there is a clear goal within the mind of the more experienced participant and the 'scaffold' is put in place to help the novice reach this goal. Within the co-construction of meaning however, control and power are shared; no predetermined goal exists, the expertise of all participants is regarded as valid and is utilised to negotiate new meaning (Jordan, 2004, p.37). Although, differing interpretations of the role of negotiation within the process of scaffolding exist (see Moll, 1990; Chaiklin, 2003; Cancemi, 2009), Jordan's distinction highlights different attitudes towards the role of the more experienced participant that are relevant to parental interactions.

As noted earlier, co-construction can be likened to the 'sustained shared thinking' (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008, p.26) seen as beneficial to early learning (David et al, 2003; Evangelou et al, 2009; The British Association for Early Education, 2012). Reflecting on the tension within the EYFS outlined above and echoing Moss (2007), Moss et al (2000) and Hughes and MacNaughton (2000), there may be a danger that complexity and multiplicity are sidelined within parental interactions in favour of scaffolding parents towards a previously identified good quality HLE. The many references to supporting and assisting parents within the literature outlined above may unwittingly favour this interpretation. This may, however, have limited effectiveness (a point reiterated in Whalley, 2007). Nonetheless, it could be argued that within international education scaffolding parents into school learning practices may remain desirable, as high levels of diversity may increase potential differences between home and school and thus necessitate a 'bridge' between the two.

Hayden (2006) argues that it can be extremely difficult to define international education or international schools due to the array that exist. The type of international institution that is the basis of this reflection describes itself as a 'British School'. Although not bound by UK statutory requirements, the school follows the English National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) and EYFS (DfE, 2012). This is quite common within international schools that identify themselves with a particular nation. However, in addition to the EYFS and English National

Curriculum the school has embraced aspects of international curricula. It is currently validated as an IBO world school and offers the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IBO, 2013) within years 12 and 13. Furthermore many staff members, especially those in leadership positions are familiar with IB philosophy. Consequently, aspects of IB curricula (in particular the IB learner profile, IBO, 2013) have been adopted. Thus, although the English National Curriculum dominates, various curricula are integrated within a single institution (Thompson, 1998). For parents unfamiliar with the educational practices embodied within these, predominantly western influenced curricula (see Tate, 2011), some form of knowledge sharing may be necessary. Furthermore, the high levels of mobility found within the student / parental body (Hayden, 2006) coupled with vast differences within international schools mean that scaffolding parents into the learning practices within any particular institution may be beneficial, as they may differ tremendously from any previous or future educational experiences.

Nonetheless, it could be argued that scaffolding is an insufficient response to parental engagement, especially within international education. Leaving aside the criticism that it cannot be regarded as a 'partnership' (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000), the limitation that the EYFS framework places on interactions with parents, especially those with differing views on pedagogy, has already been noted. Thus, when one adds the cultural and social complexity of an international school parental body, such limitations may increase. Therefore, it may be essential for international school educators to instigate a more responsive relationship with parents through a pedagogical emphasis on the process of sustained shared thinking and co-construction. This argument is put forth by a growing body of international educators who maintain that the learning needs of children in a context where diversity is high, complex and often accompanied by a fluidity of experience necessitates a home-school relationship that moves beyond scaffolding (Tate, 2011; Poore, 2005; Davy, 2011; Joslin, 2002; Van Oord, 2005; Allan, 2003 and Heyward, 2002, for example). For this to occur, however, we may need to discard conceptions of national or even international curricula to develop instead a more flexible and responsive 'intercultural' curriculum (Heyward, 2002).

Intercultural vs international education

Tickell (2011, p.85, citing Evangelou, 2009, p.23) describe children's learning as 'arising from the interplay between the "inter-connected and dynamic facets of the unique child with surrounding relationships and experiences"'. Similarly, supporters of an intercultural curriculum draw on conceptions of culture as that which both 'surrounds' and 'weaves together' (Cole, 1996, p.132); linking the external and internal understanding of culture and viewing it as a human cognitive process (Cole, 1996, p.129):

*...a process in which everyday cultural practices are enacted...
a process that takes place... inside and outside the minds (Cole
1996, p.132).*

Thus, cultural schemas, routines, scripts and models play a major part in forming cultural artefacts which mediate learning and development (Cole, 1996). In this scenario, some aspects of culture are clearly visible, while others are not. Hofstede (1994, in Allan 2002) views culture as layers in an onion - some traits concealed, others more open. Fennes and Hapgood (1997, p.14) portray culture as an iceberg; the tip is clearly visible to all (music, clothes etc.) but practices (including learning practices), values and beliefs appear submerged. Whether submerged or visible, however, all aspects are integral to the 'weaving' and 'surrounding' context that form us as social and cultural beings.

Nonetheless, for Bohm (1996), the situated nature of the 'habits of thought' (1996, p.10) embedded within our social scripts are hidden from our consciousness by our minds lack of awareness of its own inner workings. Consequently, we convert our culturally and historically created assumptions and practices (submerged or exposed) into emotionally and psychologically powerful truths. This often leads us to misunderstand our own motivations and reactions (intellectual, physical and emotional) and affects our ability to communicate. Unable to understand the historically and culturally dependent nature of our thoughts and behaviour, we have difficulty recognising the relative value of those habits created in a social, historical or cultural context that differ from our own.

Links can be drawn here to the work of Ball (1993) who notes that our interactions take place within a 'discursive frame' which 'articulates and constrains the possibilities and probabilities of interpretation and enactment' leading us to respond 'in discursive circumstances that we cannot, or perhaps do not think about' (Ball, 1993, p.15). For educationalists, national or international, our unacknowledged cultural assumptions (the frame through which we view education and our role as professionals) may prevent us from successfully interacting with others, especially those with differing views. Nonetheless, the increasing diversity found within both national and international schools may necessitate that we do so.

Until recently this may not have been such an issue. The historical development of many international schools meant that the student and parental body would often come from very similar cultural backgrounds and thus share many similar cultural 'scripts'. However, the growing demand for an 'international' education has led to a growth in the size and diversity of the student body (Hayden, 2006). Responding to these changes, however, may necessitate a paradigm shift from the concept of *international* education to one of *intercultural* education (Heyward, 2002).

As Head of the International Baccalaureate Organisation, George Walker (2002) notes that education plays a crucial role in the dissemination of the social languages that make up our particular culture. However, this is often done in a manner that acts to disguise their nature and thus reinforces the power of these cultural assumptions as 'authoritative truths' (Bohm, 1996, p.8). Walker argues that this aspect of education has been intentionally utilised and goes as far as arguing that 'education has been consciously designed and used by national governments to inculcate an awareness of national identity and often nationalistic ideology' (2002, p.19). Conversely, for Walker the significant role of education within the propagation of cultural 'truths' means that all schools, but especially international schools, are ideally placed to encourage students to transcend any such habitual thinking. For Walker (2002) the justification for consciously developing a more responsive, intercultural understanding is political and ideological; he argues that it is necessary for world peace and the future longevity of the human species, an ideal supported by Bohm (1996).

Such ideals however, may be incidental to those responsible for the fiscal viability of schools within the ‘competitive marketplace’ (MacDonald, 2006, p.192) of international schooling. Nonetheless, for Van Oord (2005), the necessity of a more dialogic, intercultural curriculum is pedagogical. He argues that if the basis of knowledge and understanding is embedded within social practices then significant but equally valid differences in how we shape and understand the world may exist between learners with differing cultural heritage. Thus, for all pupils to learn effectively within increasingly diverse international schools, it is essential that the curriculum respond to the differing learning needs and practices of its student body. In this scenario, scaffolding participants into existing school practice will never be enough to fully engage with these differences. Thus, a way must be found to explore *and* respond to differing home learning practices; potentially through the co-construction of new learning practices.

Exactly how a school instigates effective cross-cultural interaction - a skill labelled intercultural literacy by Heyward (2002) - is currently the subject of intense debate (Tate, 2011; Poore, 2005; Bronson and Merryman, 2009; Davy, 2011; Joslin, 2002; Van Oord, 2005 and Allan, 2003, amongst many others). As with the discussions on scaffolding and co-construction this debate focuses on interactions with students. However, it could equally apply to interactions with parents. Much of this debate draws on conceptions similar to Bohm (1996) and Buber (1947). Bohm argues that effective communication, such as intercultural communication, demands that all participants engage in a form of ‘genuine dialogue’ (Buber 1947, p.22), which is based upon empathy and a comprehensive self-awareness. To engage in genuine dialogue, awareness of the situated nature of thought is crucial. For Bohm, understanding that our socio-cultural upbringing is intertwined with our whole being (socially, emotionally, psychologically and behaviourally) is a crucial pre-requisite to recognising the centrality to another of their cultural ‘truths’. Once we recognise ourselves as situated beings, influenced in our thinking and emotions by our socio-cultural heritage, the way is paved for us to move away from these constraints to pursue the co-construction of new meaning with other similarly enlightened individuals. This sentiment echoes that of parental partnership advocates, who argue that self-reflection is necessary to identify practitioner values which may inhibit effective relationships and inclusive practice (Wheeler and Connor, 2009; ELPPEG, 2010).

Bohm (1996) argues that exposure to alternative truths or assumptions allow one to question the nature of one's own. However, individual reflection may never be sufficient, as exposure to alternative truths in isolation may not engender the situated self-knowledge and empathetic awareness necessary for intercultural literacy. If cross-cultural exposure does not occur within a suitably supportive context, the result can be negative in the form of cultural chauvinism, marginalisation or the denial of differing cultural assumptions (Heyward, 2002; Bronson and Merryman, 2009; Poore, 2005).

For Bohm, this supportive context is a specially constructed 'dialogue group' (Bohm, 1996, p.19) wherein participants can engage in an analytic process of 'suspension' (p.20) whenever conflict may occur. Within an intercultural curriculum, however, exposure to alternative assumptions occurs within a curricula framework which simultaneously engages in a critical analysis of its own historicity and encourages others to do the same (Heyward, 2002). Thus implicit 'truths' are made explicit, sympathetically investigated and subsequently reorganised (Heyward, 2002) through an approach wherein the skills underlying intercultural literacy are integral to teaching and assessment (Davy, 2011). Following Bohm (1996), once implicit truths are made explicit and understood as situated and contingent, participants are more likely to engage openly with others holding differing views and thus negotiate new meanings. Nonetheless, as still in its infancy, there remain a number of issues within the development of an intercultural curriculum that need further exploration.

Firstly, the dilemma noted by Hughes and MacNaughton (2000) remains; namely how far can we engage in any form of dialogic relationship with students and parents without undermining the role of the educational professional or falling into complete relativism. Indeed, one may have to question the extent and intensity of the personal and historical analysis necessary to enable intercultural literacy (Heyward, 2002) or genuine dialogue (Buber, 1947). Somewhat ironically, it also follows that the values and educational philosophy underlying the concept of interculturalism may themselves be seeped in a western liberal worldview and thus may not be acceptable to all parents, students or educationalists (Tate, 2011).

Additionally, Vygotskian influenced theories of mediation, as discussed by Cole (1996); Daniels (2001); Kozulin (1998) and Engestrom (2001), suggest that Bohm's cultural assumptions (1996) are not confined to thought and language but also become embedded within cultural tools and artefacts. Being both material and ideal (Cole, 1996), these tools and artefacts (which include rules and traditions, Engestrom, 2001) act to recreate and promulgate norms and values, some of which may offer greater affordances to dialogue and others more constraints. Thus, a responsive intercultural curriculum can only be achieved if those tools and artefacts, rules and traditions are themselves responsive (Van Oord, 2005). This point is reiterated by Guskey (2000) who notes that change in practice through professional development and learning can only have a positive outcome on student learning if it prompts organisational change. However, international schools may be resistant to change. After all if a school is attracting custom in the competitive market place outlined by MacDonald (2006), it may not deem it necessary to embrace too much change, especially as the concept of intercultural education is relatively new. Thus international schools, especially those founded on a national curriculum, may require further evidence of its benefit prior to contemplating its adoption. Consideration of this issue shaped this inquiry.

Attempting a more dialogic relationship

Within the literature outlined above there exists a persuasive argument that dialogic interaction within international schools should be attempted. Furthermore, it suggests that utilising Jordan (2004) to analyse the precise role of the 'knowledgeable expert' (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000), whilst simultaneously reflecting upon the nature and power of their expertise, may focus interaction upon the open minded negotiation of meaning within the process of 'sustained shared thinking' (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008, p.26). Nonetheless, for an individual international school practitioner desirous of more reciprocal interactions with parents, the conclusion that institutional change may first be required could be disheartening. Hedegaard (2012) however offers a glimmer of hope. As Tickell (2011), she notes that children learn through emersion in social practices within cultural contexts. These practices according to Hedegaard, (2012, pp.129 – 130) can be conceptualised as existing along different 'planes', the child being able to act upon these practices within the 'specific' plane of interaction:

A child's life always involves participating in concrete institutional practices realised by activities and interactions among multiple participants, in recurrent everyday settings; at the same time the child's activity in a concrete practice can be conceptualised from three different planes:

- *A **formal societal** plane that reflects historically evolved traditions in a society that are formalised into laws and regulations as conditions for the existence of an institution*
- *A **general institutional** plane that reflects informal conventional traditions and demands (i.e., related to school and home), taking form as practices (..... respectively, home, school, and day care practice).*
- *A **specific** plane that reflects the shared activity settings of persons in a specific institution (i.e., a specific home or a specific school...).*

If we replace the concept of the child with that of the adult, then it can be argued that all adults may affect change within the 'specific plane' of activity settings. Thus whilst recognizing the potential necessity of change beyond that plane, change could be initiated from within the specific plane of interaction. For Hedegaard (2012) this will be based upon the 'motives and competencies' (p.130) of those involved within those interactions. Consequently, it may be possible for a practitioner through their own 'motives and competencies' (Hedegaard, 2012, p.130) to attempt more dialogic interactions within the specific plane and thus learn more about the process and its potential for expansion beyond the specific plane.

Within this review of the literature it has been postulated that the historical and contextual development of the EYFS may have inadvertently created a distinction between home-school interactions that attempt to scaffold parents into the school's view of the child as a learner and those that attempt to co-construct an understanding of that child. It has been noted that

within international education in particular, the co-construction of understanding may be crucial as differing cultural heritage may lead to differing conceptions of education and learning (Van Oord, 2005). It was recognised that whilst institutional change might be necessary to sustain dialogic communication between home and school, changes could be initiated in the specific plane within interactions between practitioner and parent. In the case of this study the specific plane being considered would be the practitioner and parental interactions within the Pre-Nursery class within the FS of a large international school. Nonetheless, previous experience indicated that engaging in dialogue with parents was not straightforward. Thus, prior to the instigation of this study, a detailed analysis of previous attempts at dialogue was considered necessary.

Consequently, within the following chapter these theoretical considerations will be used to reflect on past practice and illustrate the development of the research questions shaping this inquiry. General methodological considerations will also be outlined. However, the research inquiry itself consisted of different phases, the structure and methodology of each being dependent on the lessons learnt from the previous phase. Consequently, rather than a single methodology, the narrative will present the case in two distinct phases. The case study methodology will be presented first. Each phase will then be discussed separately, wherein specific methodological considerations pertinent to each phase will be presented before discussing the findings and implications of each phase.

Chapter Two

Methodology

Within the UK, the EYFS advocates ‘partnership working’ (DfE, 2012, p.3) with parents. However, a distinction may exist between interactions that attempt to ‘scaffold’ parents into the teachers/schools view of a child’s learning and those that co-construct an understanding of the child as a learner. Whilst desiring a more dialogic relationship with parents, complexity within the development and aims of the EYFS (DfE, 2012) may commit practitioners to extending their professional role beyond the setting to influence the learning relationship between parents and children within the home. This approach could have limited effectiveness within an international school wherein diverse but equally valuable home learning practices may exist. Attempting co-construction, however, may necessitate the questioning of those socially and historically situated pedagogical assumptions that could inhibit the open minded intersubjectivity deemed necessary for co-construction (Jordan, 2004). Thus the starting point for this narrative is a reflection on past practice and its implications for this study.

The development of the research question: Reflections on past practice and considerations for future

As noted in the preface, the impetus for this study was the apparent failure of a series of workshops aimed at parents and nannies to produce any noticeable change in either attitude or behaviour regarding young children’s independence. This experience led to a re-evaluation of home-school interaction as, at their outset, these workshops epitomized my understanding of working in partnership with parents. Whilst undertaking the workshops there was a naïve belief that both partnership working and dialogue was being attempted. This was not the case. Retaining power and control and with a definite aim in mind, discussion was used merely to scaffold participants into existing school practice (Jordan, 2004). Nonetheless, even this was unsuccessful. Subsequent theoretical contemplation led to a realisation that without an attempt at genuine dialogue (Buber 1947) through the

development of open minded intersubjectivity (Jordan, 2004) even the seemingly straightforward task of information transference could fail. The theories of Bohm (1996), Buber (1947) and Bakhtin (1981) appeared to offer an explanation.

If one analyses the workshops in Bakhtinian terms, one could say that their aim was to create an 'image' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.361) of the predominant practice found within the school. It was hoped that by creating this image, the expectations would become clear to all concerned, any disparity would be lessened and an effective 'hybridization' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.358) of practice between home and school would be encouraged. However, in truth our efforts demanded full acceptance of our practice (or voice in Bakhtinian terms) by parents and nannies, whilst expecting no corresponding response from us. Thus, as far as Buber (1947, p. 22) would be concerned, instead of 'genuine dialogue' we had engaged in a 'monologue disguised as dialogue', inadvertently presenting our 'assumptions' as unalterable 'truths' (Bohm, 1996, p.8) without an examination of their situated nature. One could argue that within the process of scaffolding there should be no need for such an examination, as the aim of the whole process is to inculcate a novice into existing norms. Bakhtin (1981), however, may disagree and argue that ideas which are presented as 'authoritative' (p.346) and non-negotiable become impervious to reinterpretation and internal acceptance by others. Consequently, we had unwittingly fallen into the trap outlined by Hughes and MacNaughton, (2000, p.240) and constructed both parents and nannies as 'others' and their knowledge as supplemental, whilst demanding their full acceptance of our knowledge. Having denied participants the chance to construct new meanings, we had denied the possibility of 'hybridization' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.358) and ignored the role of negotiation within scaffolding (Moll, 1990; Cancemi, 2009).

Being based on a retrospective analysis and devoid of empirical data, these reflections are complete conjecture. Their import to this study, however, is not their veracity but that they prompted further thought about the nature of home-school relations and prompted a differing approach within another (partially concurrent) attempt at intercultural interaction. This second attempt occurred when two separate Pre-Nursery classes amalgamated to form a single Pre-Nursery Unit. Whilst not directly involving parents, the positive results of this interaction led to further reflection about home-school relations.

After a number of years of teaching alongside each other, my colleague and I decided to adopt a team teaching approach. As a consequence of the lessons learnt within the initial parental and nanny workshops, it was decided that central to the team teaching process would be an attempt at greater dialogue and co-construction of meaning within the diverse team. Accordingly, within the interactions surrounding the amalgamation of the two Pre-Nursery classes, a higher level of reciprocity was sought and, I believe, achieved.

The organisational implications of creating a single Pre-Nursery unit, meant that the culturally diverse, six- member team had to examine and question every detail of daily practice. Consequently, every participant was forced to question the assumptions underlying their daily practice and something more akin to genuine dialogue was achieved. Returning to Jordan (2004), it could be argued that this greater reciprocity encouraged the mutual co-construction of new working practices. Although remaining within the schools curricula framework and thus not affecting change within the general institutional plane (Hedegaard, 2012), within the specific plane of interaction (Hedegaard, 2012) the daily working practices that enabled this curricula were fully co-constructed. By this it is meant that there was a genuine reconsideration of all practice, resulting in completely novel routines developed mutually from the ideas and contributions of the whole team.

Reflecting on the comparative success of the interactions surrounding the Nursery amalgamation, it was noted that the production of new tools and artefacts (Engestrom, 2001) in the form of new organisational rotas, observation schedules, planning documents, reporting formats and work stations for both children and adults, were central to that process. As noted previously, being both material and ideal (Cole, 1996), these tools and artefacts (which include rules and traditions, Engestrom, 2001) act to recreate and promulgate norms and values. Accordingly, the mutual development of new tools and artefacts may have been crucial to the successful co-construction of novel practice.

As noted above, factors such as a lack of empirical evidence and a differing participant sample (one example involving parents and nannies and the other involving teaching

colleagues, albeit colleagues with differing educational and cultural heritage) prevent definitive conclusions or generalising from either example cited above. However, their import to this study is the suggestion that the co-construction of new social practices within the specific plane of interaction (Hedegaard, 2012) is possible, even between participants with differing cultural notions of learning.

Interestingly, although being regarded as very positive and initially expanded to the year group above, there is now a danger that many of these co-constructed working practices may be undermined as a direct consequence of opposing changes within the school. Thus, the mutual co-construction of new social and working practices may remain temporary if they do not have the power to affect corresponding and enduring change within the other planes of activity within which they are immersed. This final hypothesis may be of extreme importance when attempting to embark on greater parental involvement within young children's education and may be supported by Guskey (2000), who argues that for professional development to have a positive outcome on student learning, five levels of change are necessary, the third being organisational change. As noted previously, much of the literature underlying the EYFS (DfE, 2012) hints at a desire for a genuine co-construction of learning practices between teacher and parent. However, without a clearer understanding of the complexities and limitations of extending co-construction beyond the immediate moment and beyond Hedegaard's specific plane (2012), the results may be fleeting and short lived. Thus, the importance of investigating potential constraints to developing and sustaining co-construction within the specific plane are reiterated.

It is important to note that up to this point, theory was used retrospectively to reflect on past experience and gain further understanding of that experience with the hope that this may shape future practice. This is reminiscent of Schon's 'reflection-on-action' (1983, p.68) wherein an immediate response - 'reflection-in-action' (1983, p.68) is re-examined to make more sense of its meaning, often through a form of systematic analysis. For Powell (2000, p.104) 'job embedded reflection' is the form of professional development most likely to enhance teaching and learning through successful practice change. Jordan (2004) concurs

noting that, for educators, the purpose of theoretical reflection is to make informed decisions regarding practice.

However, it was only in retrospect that the significance of the events discussed were recognised, thus the evidence is anecdotal and based on the perceptions and memory of the author. Consequently, there is a danger that the explanations provided were chosen by myself to fit in with my ‘motives and competencies’ (Hedegaard, 2012, p.130). Furthermore, Hammersley (2012) notes that within qualitative case studies, the theoretical basis of studies often remain unproven and this may well be the case here. Nonetheless, from this point forth, the theories outlined above began to shape practical strategies and thus be used as a ‘normative theory’ (Hammersley, 2012, p.394); the theory having the potential to transform practice by ‘providing a coherent underlying set of principles for understanding the world and guiding action within it’ (Hammersley, 2012, p.394). Anderson and Kragh (2010) argue that although it is generally accepted that ‘our access to and framing of social reality into ‘cases’ is mediated by prior knowledge’ (2012, p.49), this is frowned upon in qualitative research in favour of a more explorative, grounded approach. For Anderson and Kragh, this is a fallacy. They argue that it is the manner in which pre-existing theory is consciously used that is most important. If this is the case, then it is crucial for the plausibility and trustworthiness (Carr, 2001; Walliman and Buckler, 2008) of this narrative that the theoretical ‘motives and competencies’ (Hedegaard, 2012, p.130) that influenced this study are made clear, hence their detailed inclusion.

Attempting a more dialogic relationship; what next?

This inquiry was prompted by the supposition that within school – home interactions, undetected ‘habits of thought’ Bohm (1996, p.10) construct parental knowledge as supplemental to professional expertise (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000). In this scenario, it is expected that parents accept the professional viewpoint as unproblematic, whilst the teacher is free to compartmentalise that of the parent. Parental engagement then, may unwittingly become limited to ‘scaffolding’ the parental body into school norms, rather than being utilised to co-construct a mutual understanding of learning practices. Consequently,

attempts at parental involvement may serve to alienate parents, especially within an international setting wherein a multitude of differing views may be held. Whilst much literature exists on parental involvement within the UK, little research exists on parental involvement within an international school. However, the incredible diversity found within international education means that exploring partnership working in this context may provide insights that could be beneficial within many contexts. Furthermore, extending dialogic principles beyond teacher/child interactions to teacher/ parent interactions is relatively unexplored. Thus it was hoped that this inquiry would be illuminating on a number of differing levels.

Initially influenced by Buber (1947) and Bohm (1996) the objective of this study was to learn more about the nature of parental involvement within the Pre-Nursery class of an international school. This objective grew out of a desire to engage in a more dialogic relationship with the diverse parental body within this context. In order to do so, it appeared essential that a way be found to move beyond scaffolding parents into existing but potentially unquestioned values and practices. Nonetheless, experience suggested that this would not be straightforward. Thus, initial research questions were devised:

- *How can a Pre-Nursery Teacher in a British International School develop a shared understanding with parents about their children's learning?*
- *To what extent can an international school develop a 'partnership working' approach with parents?*
- *What are the conditions that support or hinder the development of shared understanding between home and school within an international school?*

At this point, my particular interest converged with a desire amongst Foundation Stage staff to promote greater parental involvement, discrepancies within which had already been noted. A concurrent visit from Fran Paffard, an Early Years consultant from the University of East London, suggested that our method of assessing and reporting children's learning to the parents was not congruent with this ideal. Based upon a developmental checklist, our manner of reporting achievement to parents focused solely on the learning and development

outcomes and could, in Bakhtinian (1981) terms, have been regarded as authoritative; the content, terms and language being decided solely by the school with very little chance for renegotiation once complete. Consequently, the predominant ‘rules and traditions’ (Engestrom, 2001) within our reporting and assessment may have impeded the development of a shared understanding between home and school. However, redeveloping our reporting and assessment procedures, to include more potential for the co-construction of understanding about individual children, could stimulate a greater degree of dialogue and ‘partnership working’ (DfE, 2012, p.3). The fortuitous timing of this congruence of ideals gave a further focus to the research study and shaped the manner in which the research questions could be explored. Thus a research aim was devised.

- *To investigate the nature of home-school interactions and explore the potential for partnership working through the re-development of a reporting and assessment tool – namely the Learning Journey.*

The Development of the ‘Learning Journey’ and its role within this research project

Two years prior to the inception of this research, the reporting of a child’s learning to Pre-Nursery parents took place through two different methods. The first was an A4 folder entitled ‘The Record of Achievement’ which celebrated children’s learning through certificates and examples of work. The second, an online developmental checklist based upon the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (QCA, 2008). Although parental comment and involvement was invited within both of these artefacts, this was rarely received and informal feedback indicated that the online profile was not popular with parents. Although supported by photographic and video evidence, parental feedback indicated that the online profile was seen as an impersonal document that had little relevance to their view of their child. The document proved so unpopular that many parents had to be sent a reminder letter to prompt viewing. In addition, staff felt that a developmental checklist could not accurately portray children’s individual learning and especially disadvantaged the high proportion of our children for whom English was an Additional Language (a point reiterated by Bradbury, 2013).

It was noted in Chapter One that there may be inherent tension between a learning process based on ‘sustained shared thinking’ (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008, p.26) and assessment based on standardised developmental outcomes. Cancemi (2009, p.41) concurs, noting a discrepancy between teaching practices based on socio-cultural perspectives of learning and the assessment and reporting of that learning. This was certainly the case in our reporting. By choosing to present children’s learning through a developmental checklist we had ignored the learning process entirely. This stood in opposition to the views of EY authors such as Bruce (2004) and Carr (2001) who maintain that the learning process should remain fundamental to the assessment of learning.

Consequently, influenced by the recommendations made by Fran Paffard, and EY literature (especially Carr, 2001 and Whalley, 2007) FS staff decided to develop a narrative based reporting document entitled the ‘Learning Journey’. Within the new reporting tool, emphasis was placed on the ‘complex interaction between the child and her/his experiences within relationships, and in the environment’ (Tickell, 2011, pp.85-6) reflected through an observational narrative. Staff gathered the initial data but, motivated by the work of the Penn Green Centre outlined by Whalley (2007), parents were invited to include further observations. Within the Learning Journey, staff selected examples of significant learning from the observational data available and presented these alongside a commentary on its import to each child’s learning. Contained within the commentary was the potential to reflect on the learning characteristics (Tickell, 2011) and dispositions Katz (1977) evident and their relation to the learning and development requirements (DfE 2012, p.3). It was hoped that this would reflect the ‘unique child’ in a more positive, personal and effective manner. In turn, this may encourage greater engagement from parents and thus assist in the development of a shared understanding with parents about their children’s learning.

FS Staff made a decision to trial the Learning Journey for a year before undertaking a review. After the first year, informal feedback indicated that parents were enthusiastic about the new reporting tool. However, parental engagement remained lower than staff desired and thus further changes were considered. It was at this point that my research and professional interests converged. From my perspective, the redevelopment of the Learning Journey was a

perfect opportunity to investigate parental interaction and evaluate the potential for the co-construction of understanding between school and home.

Influenced by Hedegaard's (2012) supposition that an individual's 'motives and competencies' (p.130) may provoke change in the specific plane of interaction, I hoped to utilise the theories outlined above to explore the potential for the co-construction of understanding, both within the development of the Learning Journey and its subsequent use. Reflecting on previous home-school interactions within the setting, it was considered that unless greater inter-subjectivity and dialogue was achieved from the outset, parental involvement may inadvertently be inhibited rather than enhanced. Furthermore, it was postulated that to move beyond momentary and possibly fleeting co-constructions within face-to-face interactions in the specific plane (Hedegaard, 2012), reciprocity had to be fully embedded within the tools and artefacts that mediated home-school communication and thus the Learning Journey.

Jordan (2004) notes that the inter-subjectivity underlying co-construction requires the empowerment of all participants. By reflecting a child's learning practices at home and thus containing information that the school could not possess, the Learning Journey could empower parents and accord their views equal status (as seen in Whalley, 2007). The physicality of the artefact's movement between home and school further enhancing this potential. Furthermore, this artefact also had the potential to encourage parental participation within the learning witnessed at home; the most important element of parental involvement (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall 2008). Nonetheless, if it overly emphasised a particular perspective of 'learning' and presented this in an authoritative manner this potential may flounder. Following this line of reasoning, including a parental perspective within the redevelopment of the Learning Journey appeared essential and thus prompted the subsequent research design.

Moving the inquiry forward: Theoretical considerations and research design

Underlying the research is the concept that human interaction is situated within a particular social and historical context and is mediated by the tools and artefacts found within that context (Daniels, 2001; Engestrom, 2001; Kozulin, 1998; Wertsch, 1985; Yamazumi, 2006). Cole (1996) defines an artefact as being both material and ideal. Accordingly, cultural schemas, routines, scripts and models play a major part in forming those artefacts that ‘weave’ through and ‘surround’ (Cole 1996, p.132) human interaction. Nonetheless, humanity is not wholly determined. Within human interaction remains the potential to act upon tools and artefacts (Daniels, 2001) and to challenge the socially and historically created ‘habits of thought’ (Bohm, 1996, p.10) interwoven within every interaction. Furthermore, despite its situated nature, human interaction may be regarded as unique. This uniqueness being based on the differing journeys of participants towards any interaction; a concept reflected within the ‘unique child’ of the EYFS (DfE, 2012, p.3). It is recognition of the complex and individual nature of the cultural and historical pathways experienced by many international school students that underlie calls for a more responsive ‘intercultural’ curriculum (Poore, 2005; Van Oord, 2005; Allan, 2003; amongst others). It was hypothesised that to understand ‘partnership working’ (DfE, 2012, p.3) within a diverse international school parental body, the co-construction of meaning between home and school was necessary. Nonetheless, the manner in which this could be achieved was unclear as comparatively little literature existed regarding parental involvement within this context. Consequently, an explorative study was considered within which attempts could be made to gain greater understanding.

Discussing methodology, Cole (1996) advocates that the researcher be a ‘participant and an analyst’ (p.349) and use their systematic theoretical knowledge to ‘help things grow’ (p.349) in the context within which they are immersed. He continues noting that, within such a methodology, the ability to ‘create and sustain effective systems’ (p.350) becomes evidence of a theory’s adequacy. Jordan (2001) concurs stating that, for educators, the purpose of theoretical reflection is to make informed decisions regarding practice. Both conceptions fit perfectly with the aims of this research, which was to find ways to initiate greater dialogue with parents. Consequently a decision was made to utilize my emersion within the context to

create a 'coordinated set of lenses' (Cole, 1996, p.338) through which to interpret that context and promote change. Thus, the theories outlined in Chapter 1 were utilised as a 'normative theory' (Hammersley, 2012, p.394); the theory having the potential to transform practice by 'providing a coherent underlying set of principles for understanding the world and guiding action within it' (Hammersley, 2012, p.394).

Nonetheless, finding a suitable methodology to investigate a highly contextual and value-laden process was complex. For Jordan (2004), within co-construction (as opposed to scaffolding) there is no pre-determined aim and meaning is negotiated through the empowerment of all participants. However, unless analysis of prior understanding occurs, finding evidence for 'co-construction' within any interaction may be challenging. Yet the very process of negotiating meaning implies that the outcome should not be known prior to its actual occurrence, consequently knowing what 'understandings' to explore prior to the interaction would be problematic. To add to the complexity, the theories underlying the study indicate that shaping our interactions are imperceptible social and cultural influences, thus making participants unreliable witnesses in their own interactions. Moreover, the concept of challenging indiscernible 'habits of thought' (Bohm, 1996, p.10) may plunge us into a philosophical conundrum similar to the darkness of Plato's cave. Even if challenging the 'discursive frame' (Ball, 1993, p.15) shaping our interactions is logically plausible, any perceived and subsequently recorded change may itself be limited by our social and cultural context (as noted by Carr, 2006, in his discussion on Educational Theory) or be a symptom of the Hawthorne Effect (Walliman and Buckler, 2008).

Thus, for a novice researcher the theoretical aspirations underlying the study were incredibly complex. Furthermore, questioning 'how' to develop a shared understanding with parents hinted at the necessity for establishing causality. However, isolating the 'necessary and jointly sufficient conditions' (Hammersley, 2012, p.401) to indicate causal relations between the implementation of practices based upon this theory and subsequent home-school interactions would be incredibly difficult, if not impossible, especially within a study of this scale. Nonetheless, the potential to provide further insight into home-school relations within an intercultural context meant that, rather than discard the study, a decision was made to embrace 'the connection between the researcher and the research as a potential strength that

could influence the meaning and applicability of research findings' (Randle, 2012, p.12). Placing myself at the centre of the study meant that any discernable changes in understanding or 'habits of thought' (Bohm, 1996, p.10) could be made explicit, investigated and hopefully reorganised (Heyward, 2002). Consequently, a decision was made to 'help things grow' (Cole, 1996, p.349) through the instigation of practice change based upon my theoretical exploration and to faithfully record and tell the story of what occurred in the hope that further understanding could be gained.

Viewed in this light the choice of predominantly qualitative methodology seemed essential, the potential for qualitative methods to supply a deeper understanding of complex phenomena being widely recognized (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Bailey, 1992; Cousin, 2005; Anderson and Kragh, 2005; Randles, 2012). Furthermore, the nature of the study appeared to lend itself to a qualitative 'case study', a case study being defined as 'the detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena' (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, 2006, p.46). Yin (1993) describes a case study as an empirical enquiry wherein a contemporary phenomenon is investigated within its real life context, the boundaries of which may not be clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. He also notes that case studies can be descriptive, critical/interpretive, problem solving or theory building and thus suited the research aim. Nonetheless, the level of researcher involvement as principle protagonist and instigator of the phenomena, as well as recorder and analyst of that phenomenon, moved beyond the definition of 'participant observer' (Cousin, 2002) usual within case study research and may have more suited a participatory action research approach as outlined by Genat (2009). However, the nature of the theoretical concepts outlined above, led to the conclusion that I needed to understand more about translating dialogic aspirations into sustainable and effective strategies for parental engagement and so needed to engage in a form of explorative and theory building research. Thus I returned to the notion of a case study.

Ensuring the trustworthiness of the research

The case study has traditionally been associated with explorative or theory building research, (Hillebrand et al, 2000; Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, 2006; Yin, 1993) and thus suited my objective. Nonetheless for Hammersley (2012) to cite a case study as exploratory does not exonerate the researcher from recognising the precise role that theory plays within the case. A point reiterated by Hillebrand et al (2001) who note that, without a systematic methodology and the demonstration of the ‘existence of causal relationships along with their results’, issues of generalisability within case studies will arise. Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, (2006, p.47) also concur noting that ‘Case studies may provide data of a richness and detail that are difficult to obtain from broader surveys, but at the cost of a lack of generalisability’. Flyvbjerg (2006) notes that issues of generalisability, validity and reliability are often cited as major concerns by critics of the case study. For Flyvbjerg (2006) however, these difficulties relate to the favouring of context independent ‘theoretical knowledge’ above context dependent ‘practical knowledge’ (p.219). For Flyvbjerg, context independent knowledge is of only partial help to educational practitioners, going as far as to maintain that it is the context dependent knowledge produced by case studies that allows people to ‘develop from rule- based beginners to virtuoso experts’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.221), a notion supported by Bailey (1992). For Ball (1995) and Carr (2006), however, the issue is deeper as the concept of educational ‘theory’ is itself context bound and a product of its own historicity. Thus for Carr, the endeavour to aspire to a context independent rationally based theory with which to guide educational practice is an impossible task; educational theory being a socially constructed practice in itself. Nonetheless, Carr notes that, ‘...my argument is not that rational constraints should be removed but that their epistemic authority is never epistemological and theoretical but always practical and contextual’ (2006, p.154).

Leaving aside issues of the epistemological nature of educational theory, for Hammersley (1984, cited in Hammersley 2012) the danger of using a theory to guide action within research is that it may act as a set of blinkers, ‘the task of research becoming simply to demonstrate the validity of founding assumptions or to validate particular political or practical conclusions’ (p.397). Flyvbjerg (2006), notes that the belief that case study research ‘contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions’ (p.221) is a common misconception. He argues that, in actuality, the

case study ‘contains a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than toward verification’ (2006, p.221), citing many respected case studies where this occurs. This may be due to the ‘proximity to reality’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.236) within case studies and the intense observation demanded by the methodology. Furthermore, an awareness of the potential for bias may in fact inhibit its occurrence, a concept also reflected in Bohm (1996), Buber (1947) and Carr (2006), who argue that understanding the nature of one’s views may encourage a greater critical faculty of those views. Echoing this sentiment, Anderson and Kragh (2010) argue that it is not *whether* or *when* one chooses to use pre-existing theory to interpret phenomena but how one consciously utilises it and how open one is to opposing theories that is crucial. This may reflect Hedegaard (2012, p.130) in her recognition that a child’s ‘motives and competencies’ affect their interactions within the specific plane of activity. Thus, it may be that rather than discuss issues of validity and reliability, one should instead be discussing concepts of the ‘trustworthiness’ (Carr, 2001; Walliman and Buckler, 2008) of the researcher and their interpretation. For Flyvbjerg (2006) this can be achieved through the presentation of the evidence in as much detail as possible thus allowing the reader to come to their own theoretical conclusions. As a narrative of action instigated by a deeply embedded participant, it was essential that careful consideration was given to the collection and analysis of evidence.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the evidence presented, a number of methodological decisions were made. Firstly, a conscious attempt was made to make my ‘motives and competencies’ (Hedegaard, 2012, p.130) transparent to all concerned, both within interactions with research participants and within the re-telling of the research narrative. To assist in this aim a reflective research journal was used to record current thoughts, ideas, noted prejudices and perceived changes in thinking. Furthermore, a conscious decision was made to attempt a sufficiently ‘thick’ description (Geertz, 1973 cited in Cancemi, 2009) of the case through the systematic collection of a wide range of data from a variety of sources. Thus over the duration of the study any data potentially relevant to research aims was collected. This resulted in a vast amount of data. Analysis of this data was ongoing throughout the study (O’Hara et al, 2011) and shaped the direction of the study. Due to limitations of space, only the main themes of relevance to the continuing narrative have been discussed in depth. Nonetheless, details of the analysis procedures and justifications for inclusion are found within the relevant chapters. By consciously examining and re-examining the criteria for

selection, it was hoped that the trustworthiness of this narrative remain. The changing nature of the study had implications for consent, which is also discussed in more detail within relevant chapters. However, no data was utilised for analysis without the specific permission of all affected parties.

Delineating the case

Yin (1993) notes that within case study research the case ‘boundaries’ may not be clearly evident. Nonetheless, in order to begin the inquiry and gather sufficient evidence, some form of nominal boundary would be necessary. Consequently, it was decided to focus the inquiry on the interactions between home and school within a single academic class (mine) across the duration of an academic year. The intention was that the case study would investigate the redevelopment and subsequent use of the Learning Journey by willing participants from this prospective sample. This may have seemed like a strange choice, as the redevelopment of the Learning Journey would take place across the FS and involve a process beyond the single classroom. In addition, this could further limit the applicability and generalisability of the research. Nevertheless, this seemed the most fitting decision. Firstly, although the redevelopment of the Learning Journey was central to the study, it simply provided the focus for the overall question which was to investigate the potential for developing shared understandings with parents about their children. Furthermore, the theoretical conceptions underlying the study required a detailed investigation into interaction that would be difficult to capture within a large case. In addition, inherent within the theory is a degree of personal reflection and change that I would have found difficult to ask from a colleague. Whilst recognising the import of school wide consistency (and/or change) noted as essential by Goodall et al (2011); Van Oord (2005) and Guskey (2000), actual interactions between practitioner and parent occur within the ‘specific plane of interaction’ (Hedegaard, 2012). Thus, by concentrating the research on interactions within that plane, the case may provide a narrative relevant to international school practitioners; the academic year and the class group being the most common temporal and organisational boundary shaping their relationship with any one child and their parents. However, perhaps the main motivation was much more personal. This inquiry encapsulated my desire to understand relations between home and school and my place within them. As such the research and the subsequent narrative

represented a very personal journey. Nonetheless, Yin (1993) was correct as attempting to delineate the 'case' was far more complex than I imagined and necessitated a degree of flexibility which will be outlined wherever relevant.

Ethical Implications

The aim of the research was to explore the potential for partnership working through the re-development of a reporting and assessment tool, namely the Learning Journey. It was hoped that by engaging in a critical examination of its development and subsequent use, the process of attempting to create a shared understanding with parents about their children's learning could be explored. The aim of this research appeared honourable in that it wished to enhance relations between home and school. Nonetheless, there remained a number of ethical issues related to the close relationship of the researcher with the research participants that needed to be considered within the methodology.

The British Educational Research Association (2011, p.5) note that:

The participants in research may be the active or passive subjects of such processes as observation, inquiry, experiment or test. They may be collaborators or colleagues in the research process or they may simply be part of the context, eg where students are part of the context but not the subject of a teacher's research into his or her own professional practice.

Consequently, although the intention within the study was to focus on my relationship with the parents within my class, my colleagues within the Pre-Nursery were a crucial element of that context and needed to be fully aware and consenting of the research. Thus, a meeting was instigated with all Pre-Nursery staff to discuss the proposal. As Thai nationals, a culture understood by Hofstede (1991) to contain a deep reverence to hierarchy and authority, there was a concern that the Pre-Nursery team may feel obliged to consent. However, these anxieties were unfounded as the high levels of apparent trust and respect between team members (developed perhaps as a consequence of the team teaching process outlined previously) coupled with their high levels of professionalism, meant that the Pre-Nursery

staff were incredibly enthusiastic about the research and their involvement within it. Pre-Nursery staff were not directly involved in the parental meetings, nor within the data pertinent to Chapter 7. However, they were kept informed throughout (albeit anonymously) and the initiatives based upon this feedback (outlined in Chapter 6) were subject to the collaborative decision making process underlying our team teaching approach. Nonetheless, further permission was sought prior to the inclusion of any data within the narrative and all staff were offered the chance to review my interpretation.

It was also essential that the school management were aware of and supported the study. Thus, once consent had been received from Pre-Nursery staff and prior to any other steps being taken, the Senior and Primary Leadership Teams were presented with a written research proposal followed by a personal meeting with relevant team members. Consequently, fully informed consent (Neuman, 2003) was given. Nonetheless, in order to ensure full transparency the Leadership Teams were regularly updated throughout the research.

As part of the research context, all staff within the FS became potential participants. Hence, it was crucial that they were fully informed about the research and were comfortable with the proposal. Prior to starting the inquiry the aims and objectives of the study were outlined to the FS staff within a presentation. Conscious of my deep involvement and the impossibility of neutrality, there was a concern that staff may feel unable to voice any concerns. Consequently, although the focus of the research would be interactions within the Pre-Nursery, all staff were assured that they would be kept informed throughout the study, especially if any changes to this agenda occurred. It was made clear that, if any further involvement was requested, this would be voluntary and they would have the right to withdraw at any time (BERA, 2011). In addition, colleagues were offered the chance to meet with me individually to discuss any concerns. All members of staff were very supportive of the research and offered further assistance.

As the proposed focus of the case study was the development and use of the Learning Journey within the Pre-Nursery, at this point it was imagined that other FS staff would play a

peripheral role. Nonetheless, their enthusiasm to support to research led to a re-think and written permission was sought to record and utilise minutes from any staff meetings discussing the redevelopment of the Learning Journey. Anonymity in the representation of this data was guaranteed and its secure storage was assured (Morrow and Richards, 1996; BERA, 2011). Again, fully informed consent was received from relevant staff (Neuman, 2003). However, only one meeting was recorded and used. Prior to its use within the study, my interpretation of this data was reviewed and agreed by all concerned.

The research utilised the theories outlined within the literature review as ‘normative’ theories shaping action (Hammersley, 2012). Responding to parental need was a main theoretical aspiration; flexibility and responsiveness being central to this aspiration. Consequently, the study adapted and changed as understanding was refined. This required the regular redefining and redevelopment of consent amongst other things. This is discussed in more depth wherever necessary within the following chapters. However, in general, ongoing cycles of feedback ensured continued consent from participants.

Research design: A phased approach.

As noted above, due to a congruence of ideals between myself and the FS staff, the focus of the research was an exploration of home-school interaction through the re-development of a reporting and assessment tool – namely the Learning Journey and an exploration of its subsequent use as a tool for co-constructing meaning between home and school. Theoretical contemplation led to the hypothesis that the potential for the co-construction of meaning had to be embedded within the tool itself and thus including a parental perspective within the redevelopment of the artefact would be beneficial. Thus, the first step in the inquiry would be to garner parental viewpoints on the current use and prospective redevelopment of the Learning Journey. It was hoped that any information gathered would enhance understanding of parental needs and desires within this particular context and could be used to shape and enhance parental interactions and Learning Journey use throughout the remainder of the year. However, as the results of these meetings was unforeseen, no further methodological decisions could be made until their completion. Consequently, to ensure an accurate

reflection of the case, the narrative is divided into two phases. The first phase outlines the initial parental meetings, their methodology, analysis and results. The second outlines the impact on practice and home-school interaction that occurred as a consequence of the first. The specific methodological and ethical considerations pertinent to each phase will be outlined prior to the presentation of the results and analysis.

Chapter Three

Phase One

Gaining the parental perspective: methodology

The starting point for this inquiry was the proposed redevelopment of a reporting and assessment tool entitled the Learning Journey. This seemed a perfect opportunity to encourage maximum parental involvement within the tool by including a parental perspective within its revision. The Primary Leadership Team emphasised the importance of developing good relationships with parents and were thus supportive. However, bearing in mind that any redevelopment of the Learning Journey had to remain acceptable within the context of the school and the artefact was itself a product of its own social and historical context, it was acknowledged from the outset that the potential for radical change was limited. This could have been a depressing starting point, however, the affordances for dialogue within the Learning Journey may not have been fully utilised and thus even limited change could enhance home-school communication.

Data collection

Previous experience of parental interaction suggested that significant differences in attitude between home and school regarding young children's learning might exist. In order to maximise parental involvement within the Learning Journey any such differences would need to be understood. Consequently, a decision was made to meet with parents in order to elicit their views. Although questionnaires had the potential to encourage a wider response from busy parents than a face-to-face meeting (O'Hara et al, 2011), these were rejected as a method of data collection for a number of reasons. Firstly, the aim of the research was to explore the potential for the co-construction of understanding between practitioner and parent. Thus, if the theory was correct, 'sustained shared thinking' (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008, p.26) based on fluid and responsive interactions would be required - a process impossible within a questionnaire. Secondly, only within a responsive dialogue could differences between views be clarified and fully explored. Furthermore, experience gained

within the parental and nanny workshops suggested that small group meetings may empower parents (Jordan, 2004; Whalley, 2007) and prompt the dissonance needed for a full and frank exploration of views (Allen, 2003). This concept is reflected in Bohm's 'dialogue groups' (1996, p.18) wherein diverse participants are encouraged to express their, potentially differing, views in a supportive environment. Thus, it was decided to invite parents to attend a small group meeting. However, to all ensure that all preferences were catered for, meetings were also offered on a one-to-one basis. A number of parents noted that they wished to share their views but were unable to attend a parental meeting due to work or family commitments and so requested a questionnaire. It seemed churlish to deny this request when the basis of the research was encouraging parental involvement. Consequently, despite their initial rejection, a questionnaire was drawn up based upon the guiding questions (discussed below), translated into Thai and sent to the target population via e-mail and the Red Book (See Appendix 4).

It was not expected that the meetings would result in radical change or the adoption of educational relativism. Nonetheless, understanding the parental perspective may enhance the opportunities for co-construction within the Learning Journey. Consequently, asking willing parents to share their views seemed a very sensible and practical first step.

Sample

As noted above, a decision had been made to create a case study of home-school interactions within one particular class (mine) over the duration of one academic year, focusing on the revision, development and use of the Learning Journey. This decision was made to provide a 'case' population of relevance to most teachers; the academic year and the class group being the most common temporal and organisational boundary shaping their relationship with any one child and their parents. Moreover, it was felt that the potential complexity of attempting dialogic communication would benefit from a more intimate context and could lead to valuable practice insights, if explored in sufficient depth. Thus, a concise population size would be beneficial. The target population however, was undeniably small, even in comparison to the school parental body as a whole (See Table 1.)

		Age range of child in years	No of classes per year group.	Maximum class size
Foundation Stage	Playgroup	1.5 -2.5	1	15
	Pre-Nursery Unit	2.5 – 3	1	40
	Nursery	3-4	3	20
	Reception	4-5	5	22
Primary	KS1/Years 1 – 2	6-8	8	24
	KS2/ Years 3- 6	9-11	8	24

Table 1: Comparative size of year groups

Furthermore, the small intake in the Pre-Nursery had consequences for the makeup of the class. For example, children of teachers working at the school are offered scholarship places once they reach 2.5 years. The usual practice is to distribute scholarship children throughout the classes. However, the limited intake within the Pre-Nursery consistently resulted in a higher percentage of scholarship children per class than the rest of the school. In addition, admission restrictions operated throughout the school, limiting the number of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) in each class. However, due to the age related language proficiency of the children in the Pre- Nursery, no such admission restrictions applied and the Pre-Nursery usually contained a comparatively higher percentage of children whose home language was not English. Consequently, the insights gained may have little relevance, even within the school community.

Nonetheless, the situation within the Pre- Nursery could make this a ‘Black Swan’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.224) case study. Flyvbjerg (2006) and Bailey (1992) argue that certain case studies are pivotal, in that they have more relevance to a particular research question than others. It could be argued that the relationship between parent, teacher and child within the Pre-Nursery was extremely conducive to promoting dialogue between home and school. The young age of the children and the organisation of the Pre-Nursery resulted in regular, face-to-face contact between teacher and a high percentage of parents. Frequent contact increased the likelihood of anecdotal or personal information being shared and novel learning being discussed. Theoretically, this should mean that parent and teacher have already gained greater understanding of one another - a crucial component of both dialogue and qualitative research (Buber, 1947; Bohm, 1996; Van Oord, 2005; Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Genat, 2009).

Additionally, despite the tensions within the EYFS (DfE, 2012) outlined in Chapter One, parental partnership remains central. Consequently, achieving shared understandings may be more probable within this context than one where interaction with parents is reduced and there is less curricular emphasis on responding to the needs of the family and child. Nonetheless, the high proportion of working parents and parents whose home language was not English meant that the study also had the potential to shed light on these recognised barriers to parental involvement (Wheeler and Conner 2009, Goodall et al, 2011) within an international context.

As the aim of the research was to explore parental interactions through the redevelopment and use of the Learning Journey across the academic year, it was necessary to invite parents to share their views in the first few weeks of term. Nonetheless, despite the methodological choices outlined in Chapter Two, it was necessary to widen the potential population for these meetings. This was done for practical purposes. Potentially, the Pre-Nursery parents at the centre of the case may be completely new to the school. Consequently, their experience of the Learning Journey would be limited or non-existent and their ability to comment on its role within their child's learning minimal. Thus right from the start the complexity of delineating clear 'case' boundaries was recognised. Hence, it was decided to extend the population to include the current Pre-Nursery parents (the cohort of 2011/2012) and parents from the Pre-Nursery cohort of 2010 / 2011. The widened population might provoke a deeper understanding of the role of the Learning Journey in home-school interaction but remained delineated by involvement within the Pre-Nursery for a single year. However, once the parental meetings were completed, the intention was to return the research focus to the relationship between home and school within the parental cohort of 2011/2012.

Maximising participation

In order to explore parental perceptions, it was essential that participation from the target population was maximised and included parents from a range of differing 'home' communities (as all the Pre-Nursery children lived with their biological parents, the term parent is used throughout this study). However, there was a desire not to pre-define

participants through passport nationality. To do so would immediately deny the intercultural aspirations of the research and ignore the complexity of the parental / home community within the school, wherein very few single nationality families existed and even those that did had a very mixed socio - cultural heritage. Furthermore, experience had shown that passport nationality bore little resemblance to the holders' self-expressed cultural identity. Thus, the definition of 'home community' at this point was any family with a child in the Pre-Nursery, who was not actually employed within the Pre-Nursery.

Nonetheless, it immediately became clear that nationality could not be ignored, as there were a number of issues that directly affected the target population which would have to be taken into consideration to maximise participation. Firstly, the complexity of obtaining a work visa within Thailand meant that within many ex-patriate families, at least one family member was excluded from employment. The target population, however, contained a significant proportion of host country parents wherein both parents worked. Furthermore, the nature and expense of the school meant that many parents worked in highly demanding, high status professions and would have little time to support a small-scale research project. In addition, the Pre-Nursery contained a high proportion of scholarship children whose parents were employed within the school and may also have little time to spare. Thus, the potential for the participant sample to be very small and biased towards non- working ex patriate spouses was extremely high, unless participation amongst working and non – working parents of all nationalities could be maximised. It was postulated that increasing flexibility and choice may be the key to maximising participation.

To encourage participation a detailed letter was sent to all families within the Pre-Nursery cohorts of 2010-11 and 2011-12 (See Appendix 1). This letter outlined the aims and objectives of the research and parental meetings (Morrow and Richards, 1996; BERA, 2011). It indicated how the data would be collected, used and stored. It assured the confidentiality of participants and guaranteed anonymity within the presentation of results (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; Hill, 2006; Morrow, 2001). The right to withdraw (BERA, 2011), although not mentioned in the letter itself, was discussed with participants at the start of every meeting wherein the research process was outlined again to ensure fully informed consent (Neuman, 2003). Written consent to participate was requested within the letter.

Wheeler and Connor (2009) note that language differences can act as a barrier to home-school relations. Consequently, the letter was bi-lingual, being presented in Thai and English. Furthermore, Thai translation during the meetings was offered. This was done to ensure that fully informed consent (Neuman, 2003) could be gained from Thai speaking parents, whose proficiency in written English was unknown. In addition, translation intended to limit any perceived 'language' hegemony (Tate, 2011) that could undermine attempts at empowering participants. However, there was a possibility that a bi-lingual letter may offend Thai parents who could have interpreted it as an indication that their English was inadequate, whilst also potentially alienating those parents whose first language was neither English nor Thai. Practical constraints prevented the translation of the letter into further languages. Informal enquiries indicated that within the target population there were only two families wherein neither parent was either a fluent English or Thai speaker. Hence, the benefits of symbolically 'turning toward' (Buber, 1947, p.7) Thai speaking parents through the use of their own language and encouraging parents less confident in their use of English to participate, outweighed any potential drawbacks. The bi-lingual letter was noted and appreciated by a number of parents. However the offer of translation within the meetings was not taken up.

Previous experience of parental meetings had shown that attendance from working parents was increased if a range of options was offered. Attendance was further enhanced if these coincided with occasions when parents were more likely to be in school and less likely to conflict with work commitments. Subsequently, the letter outlined a meeting schedule with meeting times that coincided with early morning drop offs, lunch time pickup times or early evenings. In addition there was a further option to arrange a separate, mutually convenient time. The letter contained a reply slip which included a statement of written consent and outlined option preferences.

To ensure that the school remained fully informed and supportive of the research, a request was made that the school allocate two members of the Senior Leadership Team to act as coordinators between the researcher and the school management. This was agreed and all letters were first sent to the Primary Principal and the Assistant Principal for Professional Learning. Once their approval was received, the letter was sent to the target population via e-

mail. In addition, a hard copy of the letter was sent home via the Red Book (a communication tool utilised to contact parents on a daily basis). Although the further addition of a verbal request may have increased attendance, it was decided that this may cause undue pressure to participate and therefore border on unethical (BERA, 2011).

Once an expression of interest was received through the return of a reply slip, a timetable of meetings was drawn up and confirmation slips outlining the date, time and venue were sent to all participants. Depending on the meeting time a variety of locations were used. However, all locations were familiar to the parents (being within the Foundation Stage itself). In addition they were all private and quiet, having been booked for the duration of the meetings. Previous experience of attempting group dialogue led to the conclusion that group sizes of no more than six participants would be most likely to support the empowerment and full participation of all group members (a point reiterated by O'Hara et al, 2011). This could have led to an issue of how to divide the group members. However, the numbers at each session were small enough that no cap needed to be put on attendance and the make-up of each group was random. Due to a lack of mutually convenient meeting times, two one-to-one meetings were also arranged.

Prior to commencing any meeting, the research process was outlined again to ensure fully informed consent (Neuman, 2003) and the right to withdraw was discussed (BERA, 2011). Furthermore, the confidentiality of participants through an anonymous presentation of results and the secure storage of data was reassured (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; Hill, 2006; Morrow, 2001). In addition, further permission was sought to record the meetings using a digital voice recorder. At the completion of each meeting, participants were asked if they wished to contribute further and specific consent was requested to use the Learning Journey artefact as data. As previously, the use and storage of the data was outlined and the anonymity of results assured. All participants enthusiastically expressed a wish to support the research further. The right to withdraw at any time was reiterated at this point, to ensure that parents did not feel pressured into continuing (BERA, 2011).

The role of the researcher

Due to the aims and objectives of the research it was impossible to place myself in any other role than that of an active participant, fully conscious of my part as an agent of attempted change. This reflects Cole's methodology (1996), wherein the researcher becomes a 'participant and an analyst' (p.349) and uses their systematic theoretical knowledge to 'help things grow' (p.349). Consequently, it was vital that the group discussions were purposeful and remained focused. However, empowering participants was also crucial (Jordan, 2004). Thus, I envisaged my role within the meetings as setting the context, then allowing the participants to explore their views; supporting only to clarify meanings, refocus the conversation (if necessary) and ensure the inclusion of all participants. It was hoped that careful observation of the interactions and many years' experience of working with groups of children and young adults would support this aim. This approach reflects many of the ideals of Participatory Action Research as outlined by Genat (2009). Within Participatory Action Research, the 'collaborative construction and production of meanings' (Genat, 2009, p.101) is highlighted through an approach to research that 'extends the traditional role of the researcher to that of an agent collaboratively and actively engaged in the construction of local knowledge and theory with a particular group of research participants' (Genat, 2009, p.102). Although not attempting to engage fully with Genat's Participatory Action Research, many of his ideals were commensurate with those of the research, including the desire to 'establish reciprocity and an equal relationship of trust with the key group of research participants' (2009, p.102).

Nonetheless, without some form of framing structure there could be a danger of losing focus and thus wasting participants' valuable time. Consequently, guiding questions were created. These were meant to set the context, initiate the discussion and guide, if and when necessary. Based upon theoretical understanding, previous experiences and admittedly, many 'assumptions' (Bohm, 1996, p.8), the questions explored potential differences between home and school conceptions of learning that might inhibit parental involvement within the Learning Journey. It was speculated that of most import to home-school inter-subjectivity were potential differences in:

- conceptions of parental involvement and engagement within a child's learning,

- the part played by the child within his /her own learning,
- what constituted important or essential ‘learning’ in the Early Years and
- the most appropriate pedagogy with which to accomplish and assess this learning.

(See Appendix 2).

Despite drawing on theory and experience, there was a danger that these questions were based on erroneous assumptions and thus could inhibit rather than stimulate dialogue. Hence, they were developed as a prompt to be used with caution or discarded as necessary. In fact they were rarely needed. Once the context of the study was set, discussion flowed.

Nonetheless, due to my intense enthusiasm for the topic and my burgeoning relationship with many of the participants, it was also very difficult to remain on the edge of the interaction.

Consequently, my enhanced role within the discussions came under scrutiny during data analysis; this is discussed in more depth below.

For supporters of an Intercultural Curriculum, such as Walker (2002) or Van Oord (2005), understanding oneself is an important precursor to understanding others. Only then may it be possible to understand the situated nature of the ‘assumptions’ (Bohm, 1996, p.27) that dominate our interactions. For Bohm (1996) and Allen (2003) such illumination usually occurs when one is faced with a ‘dissonant’ discourse. However, contemplating one’s perceptions prior to interaction may support the establishment of reciprocity and trust. Consequently, a decision was made to explore my preconceptions, prior to engaging with parents (See Appendix 3). It was felt that without self-reflection both prior to and during the interviews, the potential for ‘scaffolding’ participants towards a particular view was high, especially if any power differential was perceived (Jordan, 2004).

The issue of power

O’Hara et al (2011) note that differentials in power relationships can be a major drawback when collecting qualitative data using small group discussions. Jordan (2004) concurs and notes that for co-construction to occur all participants within a dialogue need to feel

empowered. It could be argued that being both the teacher and the researcher, I held a 'power' advantage within the dialogue; the intensity of involvement with the participant's children contributing to this power differential. However, within fee paying international schools the power differential between parent and teacher is unclear, especially when parental involvement through a governing body or board is high (see Hayden, 2006). Furthermore, as a minority figure within the group, any perceived power imbalance could be negated. Consequently, the potential for an egalitarian exchange remained, if trust and rapport could be built (Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Genat, 2009). To enhance the potential for the development of trust, the aims and objectives of the research (and thus my 'motives' Hedegaard, 2012, p.130) were outlined from the start. Additionally, conscious and continued reflection on my 'assumptions' (Bohm, 1996, p.8) was utilised to enhance trust between myself and the group members. Nonetheless, perceived power differentials between participating parents could also affect interaction. Thus, careful observation and sensitive chairing of the interactions was necessary to ensure that all participants felt able to contribute (O'Hara, 2011).

Parental participation

Overall seven meetings took place (five group and two individual) with a total of 19 participants. Within the parental cohort of 2010-11 and 2011-12 there was a potential population of 60 families. Within some families more than one family member attended. Consequently, 16 families attended amounting to 26% of the target families (See Table 2). According to the class list provided by the Admissions Department, eleven nationalities were represented within the potential population. Within the meetings ten different nationalities were represented, although as noted earlier, caution has to be used when using passport nationality to categorise parents (See Table 3).

Parental cohort	Families in population	No of participants	No of participating families	No of families where both parents participated.	Percentage family participation
2010 – 2011	30	8	7	1	23.3%
2011 – 2012	30	11	9	2	30%
Total	60	19	16	3	26%

Table 2: Parental Meetings: population and sample

Parental Cohort	Families in Population	No of Nationalities in Population	No of Nationalities represented.
2010 – 2011	30	11	10
2011 – 2012	30	11	10
Total	60	11	10

Table 3: Parental Meetings: nationalities of population and sample

A number of analytical categories were used to assess the makeup of the participants (See Table 4). These categories were not meant to be a precise analytical tool but merely to indicate the range of participants. The categories revealed that a variety of working and non-working parents attended from the host country and the international community. Whilst many participants worked at the school itself, the large size of the school and the high percentage of secondary teachers meant that only two were known to me prior to the meetings; a fact that could enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the findings.

	No of participants	Percentage of sample
Teacher / parent - Secondary	6	32%
Teacher / parent - Primary	3	16%
Working parent (non-school)	3	16%
Working parents (total)	12	64%
Stay at home parent	7	36%
International parent - European	10	53%
International parent - Asian	4	21%
Host country parent	5	26%
Female	16	84%
Male	3	16%

Table 4: Parental Meetings: makeup of participants

Each meeting lasted between forty minutes to an hour and the number and make up of each group varied (See Table 5). A total of eight families returned questionnaires out of a possible 60 thus 13% of the target population took part (See Tables 6 and 7).

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
	No of participants	No of participants	No of participants	No of participants	No of participants
Teacher / parent - Secondary	3	0	0	2	1
Teacher / parent - Primary	2	0	0	0	1
Working parent (non-school)	0	1	0	0	1
Stay at home parent	1	2	2	0	1
Host country parent	1	2	1	0	1
International parent - European	4	0	0	2	2
International parent – Asian	1	1	1	0	1
Female	3	3	2	2	4
Male	3	0	0	0	0
Total participants	6	3	2	2	4

Table 5: Parental Meetings: makeup of groups

Parental Cohort	Families in population	No of participants	No of Participating families	Percentage of population	No of families where both parents participated.
2010 – 2011	30	6	6	20%	0
2011 – 2012	30	2	2	7%	0
Total	60	8	8	13%	0

Table 6: Questionnaires: population and sample

	No of participants	Percentage of sample
Teacher / parent - Primary	2	25%
Teacher / parent - Secondary	2	25%
Working parent (non- school)	3	37.5%
Working parent - total	7	87.5%
Stay at home parent	1	12.5%
International parent - European	2	25%
International parent - Asian	3	37.5%
Host country parent	3	37.5%
Female	7	87.5%
Male	1	12.5%

Table 7: Questionnaires: make up of participants

Although the meetings generated a much deeper level of data, the results from the meetings and the questionnaires were considered together. Altogether, 24 families participated or 40% of the target population took part in this phase of the research.

Data analysis

The aim of the parental meetings was to explore conceptions of home and school learning, to understand potential differences in these that may impede parental involvement within the Learning Journey and to explore practical strategies for the redevelopment of this tool. Within the analysis of parental meetings it was hoped that analytic themes would emerge from the data itself (Walliman and Buckler, 2008; O'Hara et al, 2011). Nonetheless, Anderson and Kragh (2010) note the fallacy of denying the existence of prior knowledge within qualitative data analysis. Prior to the parental meetings, it was speculated that four potential differences may be of most import to the efficacy of the Learning Journey:

- Different conceptions of parental involvement and engagement within a child's learning.
- Different conceptions of the part played by the child within his /her own learning.
- Differing notions of what constituted important or essential 'learning' in the Early Years.
- Differing notions of the most appropriate pedagogy with which to accomplish and assess learning in the Early Years.

These preconceptions were foregrounded in the hope that being fully cognizant of the 'preexisting conceptual lenses' (Anderson and Kragh, 2010, p.49) shaping the research would allow 'surprises' within the data to surface and retain the 'voice' of the participants (O'Hara et al, 2011). In this respect the analysis became a process of reiteration, of moving back and forth between data, theory and previous assumptions in order to make sense out of the utterances. The underlying supposition within the research placed the origin of the views expressed within the particular social and cultural heritage of individual participants. However, at no point within the analysis was the aim to prove or disprove this concept. Nonetheless, the data had to remain trustworthy (Carr, 2001; Walliman and Buckler, 2008) as its purpose was to support potential avenues of action, this will be discussed in more depth throughout the following chapter.

The data was manually coded as it was felt that the relatively small size and nature of the study favoured manual analysis (O'Hara et al, 2011). At the outset, the intention was to focus analysis on parental views of learning, home-school communication and practical suggestions regarding the Learning Journey. Both dissonance and convergence of views were sought, in order to challenge assumptions and prompt creative thinking (Allen, 2003; Bohm, 1996). However, to ensure that the participants' voices were fully heard and not masked by any researcher bias, systematic reflection on the research process itself became of equal import.

Mindful of my centrality to the research, the original aim within the meetings was to take a back seat and allow parents to explore their views on learning together. However, in truth I

played a greater role within the dialogue than originally intended. Consequently, to ensure the trustworthiness of the data (Carr, 2001; Walliman and Buckler, 2008), analysis of the discussion process was deemed beneficial. Although no conscious strategic choices were made, natural use of many years of enhancing communication with very young and EAL children was evident (See DfE, 2012; Jordan, 2004; DCFS, 2008a). During the analysis, however, the theoretical perspectives underlying the research were also used to reflect upon the discussion process.

As analysis progressed four conceptual categories began to emerge:

- The ‘educational’ perspective voiced by participants and its relevance to establishing effective communication between home and school.
- Practical suggestions and discussions regarding home-school communication strategies.
- The nature/ structure of the discussion process; specifically whether or not it engendered the trust and rapport necessary for an egalitarian exploration of views.
- Consideration of other issues.

From these overarching frameworks a number of sub themes emerged under which related ideas could be incorporated. These will be discussed within the following chapter.

Chapter Four

Phase One

Gaining the parental perspective: the findings

As noted in the Methodology, four overarching categories emerged within the data analysis:

- The ‘educational’ perspective voiced by participants and its relevance to establishing effective communication between home and school.
- Practical suggestions and discussion regarding home/ school communication strategies.
- The nature/ structure of the discussion process; specifically whether or not it engendered the trust and rapport necessary for an egalitarian exploration of views.
- Consideration of other issues.

These will be discussed in turn. Due to limitations of space only the main themes of relevance to this continuing narrative will now be drawn out and discussed in depth. However, further data related to each of these themes can be found in Appendix 5

Educational perspectives and attitudes towards home-school communication

Prior to the interviews it was felt that widespread differences between home and school perceptions on learning may exist (See Appendix 3). Specifically, there was a concern that parents may be expecting the direct teaching of academic skills, even amongst the youngest children. This would not necessarily be reflected within the Learning Journey and, thus, may create a potential barrier to dialogue. It was felt necessary to understand these and any other potential differences, prior to the re-development of artefact. Nonetheless, what emerged from the data was a surprising degree of overlap between Pre-Nursery and parental conceptions of learning and aspirations for their children. This overlap was displayed by all parents whatever their cultural background. In addition there was a great desire for cross-over and communication between home and school. Nonetheless, cultural differences that

could act as potential barriers for effective communication were noted by some host country parents, especially regarding attitudes towards manners and respect. However, deeper investigation by other parents revealed complexities within this viewpoint. Nevertheless, it remained pertinent to the remainder of the study. Interestingly, parents also clearly articulated a desire to share in our professional knowledge to be, as it were, ‘scaffolded’ into our expertise. This was perhaps the most unexpected surprise in the findings and alongside the other discoveries led to a re-evaluation of the subsequent direction of the study. Consequently, four further sub themes emerged from the data:

- Overlapping aspirations
- Aspirations for home-school communication
- Perceived cultural differences and potential misunderstandings
- A desire to share in our professional expertise

These will be used to structure the presentation of the findings within this section.

Overlapping aspirations between home and school.

Reflecting the EYFS (DfE, 2012) the predominant focus of the pedagogy within the Pre-Nursery was on children’s well-being and social and emotional development. Prior to the meetings, it had been expected that parents would favour the direct teaching of academic skills. Surprisingly, however, parental desires for their children were expressed predominantly in terms of wellbeing,

So: All learning starts with being happy, if not then they won’t learn. You don’t want to be in that environment if you are scared or anxious, this will affect learning.

integration,

V: ...once you know they are settled, then you can worry about learning things.

and behaviour

W: We consciously focus on social interaction and manners...it would be nice if she was clever but that is not our main concern.

Academic skills were rarely mentioned and only when looking for clarification about the focus of the discussion. For example at the start of one meeting participant H asked, '*Are we talking about numbers and reading?*' Furthermore, well-being was seen to be central to learning within the Early Years and beyond,

P: First it (learning) is mainly social then becomes more academic but social still important motivation, attitude that is still social.

This view was expressed by parents of all backgrounds. However, it was recognised that parental emphasis may alter as their children grew older. A parent who was also a secondary teacher noted,

V: At a parents evening you focus on how they are going to do in their GCSE, nobody talks about it (wellbeing, etc) that much.

However, although overlapping aspirations for learning existed, home learning and school learning were perceived as quite distinct entities. This was a view shared by many participants, whatever their cultural heritage.

St: They (school and home) are two completely different environments.

Learning at school was seen as explicitly planned, whereas learning at home often occurred implicitly.

K: School learning is more 'structured' in that the environment is specifically set up to encourage learning.....but at home it is more incidental.... it come more naturally.

This was then followed by a discussion on cooking. Many participants related home learning specifically to everyday activities such as cooking and shopping, perhaps unaware that the Pre-Nursery pedagogy also aimed to nurture 'meaningful contexts' (Donaldson, 1978) to

support young children's learning. This was the first indication of potential misunderstandings about the Pre-Nursery pedagogy.

Nonetheless, the distinction between home and school was seen as a positive factor, as the school community offered opportunities not afforded by the home community,

St: Huge amounts of learning happened at school, which would not have occurred if M had stayed at home.

(When discussing why a child was less likely to engage in art at home)

J: Probably because we don't set up that environment.

Some even going as far as identifying aspects of 'school learning' and excluding it from the home learning until necessary,

Sa: We made a conscious choice to want her to play and not to learn certain things too early. There is a distinction between what we 'teach' children and others things they learn by interacting with us.

This again indicated a potential misunderstanding of our pedagogy wherein children learn through interaction within meaningful relationships rather than the discrete teaching of 'skills'. Thus, although overlap in aspirations for learning were apparent, it became clear that the distinctions seen between home and school learning may have masked some crucial misunderstandings regarding the nature of the learning process within the Pre-Nursery. However, close communication between home and school and a desire to understand more about our pedagogy were also clearly expressed.

Aspirations for home /school communication.

Although many parents saw a clear distinction between home and school learning, they did express a desire for more cross over and communication.

W: Surely if they were connected they would get more out of it.

Al: It is good to have consistency, good for children to be aware that home and school are in touch.

There were a number of differing reasons given for this desire. It was recognised that there are multiple influences on children to which children quickly adapt,

Sa: Children do learn, I can do this at home, I can do this at school.

However, it was thought that an ability to see links between these influences could foster greater learning.

J: I think the school and family have to be together. In a similar direction not to confuse the children, if the school teach like this and then they come back home and 'no,no,no you cannot do like that', it will confuse the child.

(Discussing independence)

P: School actually has higher expectations. Perhaps we should do more to keep in line with this, as he knows what he can get away with at home.

Although parents appreciated consistency and cross over between home and school, they did not expect or desire it at all times.

V: It would be very hard to take into account forty different methods of dealing with child behaviour. In particular incidences it may be beneficial. For example, if behaviour 'flares up' over a particular thing and there is a way that parents deal with it which works, this would be useful to know but you (referring to teachers) could not possibly do it with all things.

However, too little overlap caused misunderstandings and potential problems for parents, teachers and children.

Al: If a child has not experienced any form of 'time out' at home, they may not understand what it (if used at school) is all about. They may not get what it is for.

In addition, parents expressed a desire to ‘see’ into their children’s school lives more clearly.

Sa: I don’t know what L does all day, I don’t know how she is with people - would be interesting. I think we should communicate with you more and you with us more.

This was not necessarily motivated by a concern to support learning but simply to understand more about their young child and to share in their child’s experiences whilst apart from them.

Sop: We just want to know what is going on.

However, the parents did not always express this desire for fear of being deemed ‘pushy’.

J: I would love to become more involved but have heard that some teachers don’t want parents around.

P: We don’t want to be pushy parents.

This fear was expressed by different parents within four different meetings. In addition, parents struggled with understanding how to communicate with teachers; what to say, how to ask,

X: I think we all need to know more about what the Red Book is about... not sure how to use it fully, just thought it was about notices but then I wonder, “What’s my daughter doing?” I wonder all the time, so I do have questions, but I do not know if it is appropriate to ask in the Red Book.

Also, how much to share,

Sa: I write (in the Red Book) and then wonder, is the reaction “Does she always have to write in this book? I have enough to do today without reading long messages from S again today?”

They also worried about how their efforts would be perceived.

K: We were not sure how much information to include in the Learning Journey. We did not want to come across as “Look how wonderful our child is”.

This fear of being deemed pushy or overconfident was most clearly articulated by teachers who was also parents in the school (four out of the six parents who directly expressed this concern were teachers). This had worrying implications, as it intimated that there existed a mixed attitude towards home-school communication within the school. In addition, the meetings exposed perceived cultural differences that may hinder home-school relations.

Perceived cultural differences and potential misunderstandings of Pre-Nursery pedagogy

The degree of overlap between home and school aspirations for the children was a very pleasant discovery. However, as noted above, the parental meetings also revealed a number of misunderstandings regarding the Pre-Nursery pedagogy. Furthermore, several host country parents’ perceived strong cultural differences between home and school. Some of these were regarded as positive. For example, when discussing the differing educational perspectives of Thailand and Britain, one host country parent noted that,

Sop: For me, the Thai system is about memorising. I don’t want my kids to learn like that, I want them to have choice, to learn and to know themselves.....myself I am not sure what I am good at because of the way I learn. I don’t know myself and I don’t want my kids to be like that.’

Another also perceived these differences as positive.

So: We bring them here to give them the British System’.

However, choosing the British system, did not indicate a complete acceptance of the educational philosophy.

H: Here (pause) they always want to come to school, but at home the Thai/Chinese system is very academic driven so we think that the academic side is not strong enough for us, but you cannot have everything. So if we want the other things we have to supplement it or something like that. We already choose this system, so we already supplement it.

Thus, it was clear that each system was seen to have its own advantages but also limitations. This was a concept that was reflected in four out of the five group meetings, but was not raised within the meeting dominated by Teacher Parents.

However, not all differences were seen as positive as some parents noted a difference between Western and Asian values within the school in terms of respect and manners. One host country parent notes,

So: Our issue may be with manners because here (referring to school) they can do anything. Like when they eat. They should not use their fingers, or make loud noisesP always says “at school we don’t have to do that”, things like that.

Another states,

Sop: It would be very good if we can add something like that to the Foundation Stage.
(Discussing the Thai emphasis on respecting elders.)

The distinction between Western and Asian attitudes to manners, especially table manners was raised in two separate parental meetings and was very clearly stated as cultural. Discussing consistency between home and school, the host country parent starting the conversation on manners begins with

So: My case is so different because of cultural things.

Her contribution ends with,

So: It is a very different cultural angle.’

Cultural differences in attitudes to manners, however, were challenged (albeit in a very friendly manner)

Sa: I am know that I am very big on it (a British mum referring to manners) but I am not sure if this is true of everyone.

To which another host country mum replied,

H: Perhaps we Asians put too much emphasis on manners.

The discussion lasted a few minutes and concluded by noting that although all the parents present regarded manners highly, it may be that the school did not. A host country parent noted,

H.... maybe nobody is watching them eating their lunch'.

This was also queried by a British teacher/parent within the group (again very politely) though it was noted that perhaps school 'could do more' and that the emphasis on manners may be inconsistent. The same parent concluded,

Al: It may be something we need to address, as with my class it is not consistentdifferent people take them to lunch. Perhaps we need to ensure consistency.

This exploration of views took place in a relatively diverse group (Group 5, see Table 5) within the smaller, less diverse group (Group 2, see Table 5) the existence of a difference between Asian and Western attitudes towards manners was accepted and not questioned. This was a particularly thought provoking revelation and had a strong influence on the remainder of the study. It indicated that the parents were not aware of the emphasis placed upon manners and respect (for both the community and environment) within both the school and the Pre – Nursery pedagogy. The cultural explanation given for an apparent lack of manners at dinner time suggested a more impenetrable barrier to communication than the actual reality; the logistical difficulty of organising lunchtime supervision for over 2,000 students, rather than a lack of desire on the part of the school for appropriate lunchtime manners. This and the other misconceptions outlined above, indicated that our educational

philosophy was not being articulated to parents as clearly as we had previously thought. This had a significant impact on the direction of Phase Two of the study, as did the clearly articulated desire of parents to share in our professional expertise.

A desire to share in our professional expertise

Many parents expressed a strong desire to understand more about how children learn in school.

Sop: At this stage, even as parents we don't know what our kids like. So if the school sees what our kids are like then you can tell us as this would help us a lot . Like M, Mrs.M tell us that he really like science. That helps us a lot as we don't have the experience to see this and see their interests we know they like this toy, but we need feedback on learning.

They wished to learn more about how teachers worked and gain practical ideas from them.

W: Guide us. Show us. During reading, give us tips ... not just reading... to sing, to play. On Open Morning, you can show us how to sing songs, low voice high voice etc. We don't know these things.

H: We teach them our experience, which is a little bit different from in school....we cannot support in all areas based on our experiences.

This desire was expressed in most meetings by parents from all cultural backgrounds, apart from the parent teacher dominated group. This acceptance of the 'professional' displayed a very confident attitude towards the parental role which was not expected from the review of the literature and prompted a greater reflection on the role of 'scaffolding' within parental interaction. However, this recognition of expertise also had unforeseen consequences in that some parents admitted to relying on the school to undertake elements that they did not necessarily have the time or expertise for.

J: I like the idea that the teachers take responsibility for that type of learning. (This comment referred to the development of independence especially within eating and toilet training.)

Interestingly, within one meeting it was admitted that other parents (not present at the meetings) expressed the view that they paid for the teachers to educate their children and thus had no need to become involved themselves. Thus recognising professional expertise was not always beneficial to ‘partnership working’.

Practical suggestions and discussion regarding home/ school communication strategies

During the interviews parents discussed a wide range of home/ communication strategies used by the school, indicating the range of strategies that they themselves used. (See Table 8) The parents expressed appreciation for all the communicative methods. Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that the information they contained may have been lost.

(Discussing the information sent at the beginning of the year)

L: I have to be honest - I have forgotten it.

However, once conversation moved onto more personalised communication, there was detailed recall of both the method and its significance.

(Discussing the benefits of an Open Morning)

St: Now after attending, if M comes home and says she has been drawing I can actually visualise what she's been doing ... and then help and support her, by feeling more a part of it and understanding.

K: The photo books and the blog encourage a lot of discussion. We sat down at the weekend with the ipad and talked about what he was doing.

Sa: It (the blog) widens your perspective of what goes on. When I ask L what she did in school, she only ever says painting. (Sa then moved on to a detailed description of the activities noted on the blog)

However, participants also admitted that they may not show their appreciation, thus leaving teachers unaware that they are being regularly used.

St: I may have just signed it, but it meant a lot to me.

L: A short reply does not mean it has not been looked at or appreciated.

The number of home-school initiatives was on the whole seen as positive. Nonetheless, asking parents to attend too many meetings might be detrimental.

(Discussing the annual parental inductions)

W: My friend, she has four children (in the school) she does not come anymore as it is all the same.

J: My husband travel a lot, if he wants to come into school, it has to be worthwhile.

It was noted that however many initiatives in existence, language barriers will always remain an obstacle for some parents. A very active member of the Parent Teacher Group (PTG) noted,

E: I have some Thai parents (in the PTG) who are not comfortable talking in English and are too afraid to talk to the teacher.

She noted that parents often use other parents to translate and clarify school expectations, rather than approach the teacher. However, the limitations of this solution were noted.

E: Sometimes they come to me as I am the Thai rep and ask me to ask them (referring to teachers). Of course I will, but after I give you the answer, do you have other questions? These are not my questions... I say I can translate but they say 'No, it ok'. Then I feel sorry for the school because they try to contact the parents all the time.

Furthermore, it was noted that language is a contentious issue that may not be easily solved through the use of bi-lingual publications.

E: We have a lot of arguments in the PTG because our Thai parents want to read the manual in Thai – but then what about our Japanese parents?

Although this particular issue was only raised within one meeting, the active involvement of the contributor within the PTG hinted at the import of this issue amongst host country parents.

Consideration of the ‘Red Book’.

As far as the parents were concerned, the most appreciated method of home-school communication was the ‘Red Book’ (a small red communication book that moved between home and school every day and was used for notes and messages). This was a universally expressed view and discussions about the ‘Red Book’ were very enthusiastic and dominated many meetings. It was seen as an incredibly important tool by parents.

L: I actually go home and fight to see the red book first, to see if there is anything in it.

V: If I go to bed and realise that I have not read the Red Book, I get out of bed.

Al: I love the Red Book!

However, it was felt that teachers did not always appreciate its import, evidenced by inconsistent use,

Na: My friend has three children in the same year group; she says it depends on the teacher you get

and its complete removal after Year Two.

So: Now that my daughter is older, I miss the Red Book.

Sa: The Red Book is the first thing I look at after school.

H: Yeah I know, I think every parent does.

So: Yes, but it becomes less and less every year you grow up.

For most participants it was the personal nature of the communication within the red book that was key to its popularity.

St: Even if it just said “M has had a nice week, have a nice weekend”, it was enough.....it was personal.

The enthusiasm shown for the Red Book was a complete surprise, but could not be ignored and had a considerable impact on the subsequent direction of the research.

Consideration of the ‘Learning Journey’

A number of practical suggestions were made regarding the Learning Journey. Including involving children more in its preparation,

J: The title ‘Learning Journey’ should mean it incorporates more of N.

It being made available prior to teacher/ parent consultations,

C: If you are presented with a document for the first time (at a parental consultation) can you really comment or ask questions? We would prefer it before, especially as my husband travels a lot and may not be able to attend but will definitely have a question (laughs).

Although keen to become involved, one parent in particular felt that it remained too controlled by the school,

So: Even if you increase the frequency of sending the Learning Journey home, it is still one sided from the school. The school decides when it comes home and when things can be sent back to school, because of this, it becomes a chore. You can come back from holiday and panic because you have not put anything in.

However, altering the format might encourage more parental and child involvement.

J: The way it is presented may prevent involvement.....if we had a big folder / envelope that freely travels back and fore between home and school (at any time) then you may get more parental and child involvement. (J then suggests a two tier system – the final Learning Journey being the more formal aspect, chosen from the folder work).

After one interview had finished two EAL parents came forward and spoke at length about the importance of celebrating the home language and home culture through the Learning Journey. (This was not digitally recorded, but notes were immediately made).

However, a number of parents with older siblings (and thus more experience of home-school communication at the school) felt that if the teacher ignored contributions from home, then both they and their child could lose interest in the document. This was felt to have been the fate of contributions to the previous document ‘The Record of Achievement’.

K: If it has no purposeful meaning, parents will stop sharing ideas in it. This has been the fate of our Records of Achievement. They have become storage folders (Noted by parent / teacher).

In addition, potential discrepancy between levels of involvement by differing parents was a concern.

An: Some parents may be very busy, whilst others may do loads of things ... children might get upset.

The parental meetings were very illuminating and the enthusiasm shown by the parents was infectious and led to me to play a greater role in the meetings than originally intended. Consequently, interview process itself came under a detailed scrutiny.

The interview process

The aim of the meetings was to explore parental attitudes to learning and home-school communication to enhance the redevelopment of the Learning Journey. Thus, a degree of mutual trust and rapport was deemed essential (Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Genat, 2009). Within the analysis, a number of factors were identified that could indicate that this was achieved.

Firstly, it was noticed in four out of the five group meetings no one speaker dominated and that every participant made regular contributions to the discussion. In the fifth meeting, two participants remained on the edges of the interaction, participating predominantly through affirmative or negative gestures and noises. Both responded positively to inclusionary attempts such as direct questioning and reflection on their utterances. Nonetheless in comparison to the other participants their contributions remained relatively small. However, after the group meeting had finished, these participants spoke to me at length regarding their views on the discussion and the Learning Journey. Subsequent interaction with these individuals indicated that they were the least confident users of English within the group, thus reaffirming the centrality of language issues within home-school communication, especially within an international school. The views expressed, although not digitally recorded, were annotated and included within the final analysis. Consequently, all participants expressed their views and this is reflected within the data above.

Within all the meetings the tone of the conversation was warm; there were many instances of laughter and lots of supportive and affirmative noises throughout. In addition, many personal anecdotes were shared, often leading to more laughter. (Examples are not included as they contained personal information that may compromise anonymity). Furthermore, participants showed concern and respect for each other. For example, when one parent expressed worry about an aspect of her son's behaviour, the other participants immediately adapted the discussion to reassure and support her. In addition, perceived differences in opinion between participants were explored further and commonalities found, by both participants and the researcher. This was most clearly expressed in the discussion regarding table manners.

Throughout the discussions, a range of different strategies were used to explore interpretations and clarify meaning both by myself and other participants. These included the re-phrasing of information,

H: We do this through everyday interaction - we don't say you have to sit while you are eating.

Me: So you hope that by 'modelling' it, it will occur?

H: Yes

The exploration of a viewpoint,

Me: (Referring to the Learning Journey) So, it is those sorts of things, the social learning that you don't have the opportunity to see at home, that you want to see?
(Sounds of agreement and 'yeah, yeah')

The support and expansion of utterances,

Me: It seems that the Red Book is an incredibly important document and is something that the parents respect and use a lot, is this how you feel?

And direct questioning.

Me: (Discussing Red Book) So you've experienced that?

In order to support inclusion differing strategies were used, including utilising previous knowledge of the participant,

Me: N, you mentioned this to me previously, would you agree?

Interestingly, participants regularly questioned the interviewer.

C: I am not really sure, what do you think?

K: What did you have before the Learning Journeys?..... Did you have feedback from parents about how they felt?

Consequently the interviewer openly reflected on her perceptions and misconceptions and invited further comment.

Me: When children bring things in we make a big fuss of it, but perhaps we are not systematic enough about it or encourage parents enough to do it more regularly. Have you any suggestions how we can do it?

Respect was shown by all participants to each other's viewpoints. Again the mutual exploration of manners until it reached an amicable conclusion was a very good example of this. Nonetheless, factors that may have inhibited an open dialogue were also identified.

There were occasions when non-verbal indicators, such as tone of voice, caused disruption to the dialogue. For example, after one participant made a contribution an 'ummm' was heard. The contributor immediately stopped speaking. This 'ummm' may not have indicated anything detrimental, however, it still interrupted the flow of the discussion which took a minute or so to recover. Luckily however, such incidences were rare and on the whole the conversation flowed with little interruption.

Perhaps, however the biggest concern was the frequency of the contributions made by myself. In retrospect, the aim of attempting to take a back seat was perhaps naive, especially when the research was based upon developing communication between home and school. However, although the frequency of my contributions (approximately every third or fourth contribution in group discussions) was more than I would have hoped, they were used predominantly to clarify and expand on utterances made by participants. Nonetheless, it is important to note the degree of contributions made by myself. Bohm (1996), Buber (1947) and Van Oord (2005) note that an awareness of the nature of ones views may encourage a greater critical faculty of those views. It is hoped that, despite the relative frequency of my interactions within the discussions, a critical awareness of my role ensured parental expression. Participants certainly remained enthusiastic and supportive of the research throughout the academic year.

Nonetheless, in order to add reliability to my interpretations, a summary was sent to all participants via e-mail and Red Book asking for clarification. As no amendments were requested or further comments added, it was assumed that the summary was an accurate representation of the discussions.

Consideration of other issues

The analysis of the interviews led to some further reflections that will be discussed briefly below, as they are pertinent to the trustworthiness of the data.

As noted previously, empowering the parents and exploring potentially diverse viewpoints was the main aim of the discussions, thus building trust and rapport was crucial (Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Genat, 2009). Ironically, however, a positive rapport within an interaction could also mean that participants, perhaps even unconsciously, temporarily adopt an opinion that may not be entirely in keeping with their usual view (a point noted by O'Hara et al, 2011). In fact, it was perceived that some of the participants expressed contradictory viewpoints. For example, in the discussion on manners one participant first agrees that this may be an issue but then notes her child's improved table manners since starting school, which she then attributes to the school. Consequently, the potential of an effect within which participants wished to express views perceived as acceptable to the group had to be considered.

This may have been exacerbated by the make-up of the groups. An unanticipated consequence of the meeting times offered was that some ended up being 'clustered' in groups with potentially similar participants (See Table 6). For example, Group 1 met at the end of the school day and was dominated by parent/ teachers, as was Group 4. Groups 2 and 3 were held just after drop off time and were dominated by stay at home parents from the host country. In some ways this could have helped participants express their views (see Myers, 1975), or have the converse effect of stifling debate. It was noted that the greatest exploration of differing ideas was experienced within the Group 5 which contained the greatest range of participants (an observation supporting Bohm's [1996] view on the need for diversity within dialogue groups). Furthermore, within the larger Groups 1 and 5, debate was higher than

within the smaller groups, wherein there tended to be agreement. However, the discussions were not subjected to a detailed analysis on these issues.

Finally, it was noted that the majority of participants were already fairly involved within their child's education or within the school itself (measured informally through experience with the parental cohort). Returning to Marsico et al, (2013), the discussions may have attracted those parents already in alliance with the school and thus failed to engage parents with potentially differing views.

The implications of these findings will form the discussion within the following chapter.

Chapter Five

Phase One

Gaining the parental perspective: discussion

As a consequence of the group discussions, a number of important insights into the parental perspective within this particular context were gained. Interestingly, on the whole, the data analysis stood in opposition to my preconceptions and thus supported Flyvbjerg's supposition that 'proximity to reality' (2006, p.236) may overturn a researcher's 'preconceived notions' (2006, p.221). The discovery of a high degree of overlap between parental and home perceptions on learning was incredibly powerful and clearly illustrated the power of 'turning toward the other' (Buber, 1947, p.7) within partnership working. However, the misconceptions displayed by parents regarding the Pre-Nursery curriculum was disappointing. Nonetheless, further reflection on this issue prompted a deeper understanding of the interaction between scaffolding and co-construction. Walker (2002) argues that the open minded reflexivity central to an intercultural curriculum is based upon a clear articulation of one's views, a willingness to question these but also a commitment to use evidence and reason to defend them if necessary. Consequently, rather than being a negative and alienating tool, the process of scaffolding might be an important first step in the co-construction of meaning. Our failure then, to provide the parents with a clear and comprehensive articulation of our views may have impeded the development of meaningful dialogue. Thus, finding a more effective way to scaffold parents into a deeper understanding of our pedagogy would be beneficial. This realisation provoked a change of emphasis within the study, supported by additional insights gained from the parental meetings.

Of great import to Phase Two was the relatively confident stance towards the parental role shown within the meetings. The clearly articulated desire to share in the teacher's expertise suggested a self-assurance not always evident within the literature outlined within Chapter One. The parents appeared perfectly happy to place the teacher in the role of 'knowledgeable expert' (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000, p.250) and expressly requested to be 'scaffolded' into this expertise. However, although respecting this professional knowledge, its limitations were also articulated; the 'British System' being seen to have advantages and constraints.

Accordingly, the expertise of the teacher was desired to supplement existing parental knowledge. This was interesting reversal on the main thrust of Hughes and MacNaughton's argument (2000). A reversal explained perhaps, by the education and social status (Hayden, 2006) of international school parents compared to those targeted by such initiatives as Parents As First Teachers (PAFT); the power of educational choice adding to this confidence. Identifying differences between the parents discussed by Hughes and MacNaughton (2000) and those within this study was beyond the scope of the research, consequently this hypothesis remains conjecture. Nonetheless, the importance of understanding the needs and desires of the parental cohort (Goodall et al, 2011) was reiterated. Of great interest to the study was recognition that both British and Thai educational philosophies were situated as this suggested that they could also be investigated and reorganised through the co-construction of new meanings, as noted by Heyward (2002) and Bohm (1996). Nonetheless, this reorganisation might depend upon a clear articulation of both pedagogies and supported the growing view that there existed a more complex relationship between scaffolding and the co-construction of meaning than originally thought.

The recognition of professional expertise, however, was not always positive as it was intimated that less confident parents may choose to rely upon that expertise. Furthermore, the fear of being deemed 'pushy' expressed by some parents indicated that parental confidence was not universal. Marsico et al, (2013), identified three distinct responses to home-school interaction - acquiescence, alliance and conflict. It may be that the parents feared positioning themselves beyond a position of 'alliance' and thus being deemed 'pushy'. Interestingly, this notion was most clearly articulated by parents who were also teachers within the school. For example, out of the six parents directly stating this fear, four were teacher/parents. On one hand, this could indicate a fairly negative attitude towards parental interaction by teachers. Conversely, it could simply be evidence of the complex relationship and duality of roles experienced by teacher/parents to their fellow work colleagues (Zilber, 2009). Nonetheless whatever its origins, this fear remained a barrier to parental relations and needed to be taken seriously. Furthermore, it indicated that encouraging greater parental involvement within the Learning Journey may need attitudinal change from both school and home. It was becoming more evident that the relationship between home and school in international schooling was complex (O'Gorman and Ailwood, 2012) and fraught with multiple 'motives and competencies' (Hedegaard, 2012, p.130). Moreover, the potential limitations of attempting

change from within the specific plane of interaction (Hedegaard, 2012) were also becoming more evident.

Of great import to Phase Two was the enthusiasm shown for more personalised home-school communication compared to more generic information. Although an array of parental literature was already provided by myself and the school, the discussion indicated that much of this was either ignored or forgotten. This was most clearly articulated within the comments concerning parental meetings. In addition, the lack of recall regarding curricula information sent within generic booklets/ newsletters, as opposed to the in-depth recall of more personalised items of communication was very interesting. The particular warmth and enthusiasm shown for the Red Book was a complete surprise. This particular home-school artifact was often viewed by teachers, myself included, as another 'chore'. Subsequently, often it contained mainly procedural and administrative information. However, the regard with which it was shown by parents led to a complete re-think of this humble tool and it gained a central place within innovations in Phase Two.

It was thought-provoking that an apparent lack of table manners within school was attributed to a cultural difference in attitudes towards eating, rather than the logistical enormity of organising lunchtime supervision for over 2,000 students. This was an interesting moment as it created 'dissonance' (Allen, 2003) amongst parents of varying cultural heritage who all saw manners, especially table manners, as essential learning for young children. Although this dissonance was soon explored and clarified, it created the most (although actually very minor) tension within the parental meetings. Nonetheless the positive outcome of this dissonance, wherein all parties negotiated a more acceptable 'group' viewpoint may support Bohm's view that cultural 'habits of thought' (1996, p.10) can be challenged within a mutually supportive environment. Nonetheless, a concluding statement that '*Perhaps we Asians put too much emphasis on manners*' hints that any such challenges to 'habits' may remain temporary and bound to particular interactions, unless they can provoke change within interactions beyond the specific plane.

As table manners have always been regarded by Pre-Nursery staff as an important element of the curriculum, this was a relatively difficult moment in my ‘turning toward the other’ (Buber, 1947, p.7), wherein it was admittedly a struggle not become defensive. This was reflected in a research journal entry following this particular meeting. Nonetheless, this discussion reiterated the importance home-school dialogue and responding to the needs of parents within a particular context (Goodall et al, 2011), as with further reflection it was realised that this aspect of our curricula lay unexpressed, the information routinely shared with parents being based on a previous misconception of their desires for their young children (See Appendix 3). Consequently, it was realised without meaningful dialogue and the production of a clear ‘image’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p361) of our curricula, reinforcing cultural stereotypes could result, with potentially negative consequences for the relationship between home and school.

The influence of parental support networks was interesting. The school has an established Parent Teacher Group (PTG) (mentioned above) and every class has a volunteer Class Parent. The role of the Class Parent, however, is not clearly defined and is often limited to organising coffee mornings, supplying additional help for trips off campus and organising end of year gifts for teachers! Nonetheless, the data suggested that a more powerful role in enhancing home-school relations may exist. One former Pre-Nursery parent was identified as being particularly active in supporting FS parents. This parent was approached and was keen to be interviewed. However, we were unable to find a mutually convenient time prior to her relocation to America and thus this opportunity was sadly lost. At this point, other aspects of the research then took precedence, though this remains a potentially fruitful avenue for further exploration.

Within the meetings, the limitations of responding effectively to the needs of parents within the specific plane (Hedegaard, 2012) were also clearly illustrated. For example, utilising dual language publications within home-school communication was clearly contentious and beyond my power to initiate; whatever its potential benefits. In fact, this strategy had previously been attempted. Pre-Nursery staff had asked for signs such as, ‘For the safety of our children, please close the gate’ to be produced in English and Thai for the benefit of Thai speaking nannies. This request was refused by management as school policy dictates that

signs be in English. Nonetheless, a compromise was reached wherein temporary signs within the Pre-Nursery itself could be bi-lingual but official signage could not. Consequently, bi-lingual signs containing information particularly pertinent for nannies were handwritten. This was an effective strategy and informal feedback given to our Teaching Assistants noted that it was appreciated. However, a complete change of staff within the Pre-Nursery since the study (including myself) has meant this practice has not continued, thus re-iterating that unless they become embedded within 'rules and traditions' (Engestrom, 2001) co-constructed learning practices may be temporary. Nonetheless, much practitioner guidance on enhancing parental involvement emphasises an individually reflective approach (Wheeler and Conner, 2009; National Quality Improvement Network 2010). Utilising the writings of Bohm (1996) and Buber (1947) this research is embedded within such an approach. Yet at every point the confines of such an approach are further outlined. Echoing Guskey (2001), it appears that professional development based upon the individual practitioner can only have a limited impact on student learning, unless accompanied by corresponding institutional change.

On a positive note, the discussions clearly illustrated the enthusiasm and involvement of participants. Nevertheless, 60% of the potential population did not contribute. Although, the parental cohort within international schools may differ from those studied by Wheeler and Connor (2009), many of the barriers to parental involvement appeared similar, for example, work commitments, pressure of time, language barriers etc. At this point it may have been beneficial to explore these further. However, the enthusiasm and commitment shown by participants led to a decision to continue with the original focus of the research, rather than focus on 'hard to reach' parents (Harris and Goodall, 2008, p.286). Thus the re-development of tools and artefacts to stimulate the co-construction of understanding between home and school remained fundamental, although the centrality of the Learning Journey to the inquiry was re-assessed.

The parental meetings led to a deeper understanding of the inter-relationship between scaffolding and co-construction. In turn this affected the direction of the study and led to the expansion of the research focus beyond the Learning Journey to include an array of other tools and artefacts. For ease of narration this will be called Phase Two. The following chapter will outline the strategies, tools and artefacts utilised and adapted within this phase of the research.

Chapter Six

Phase Two

Enhancing the potential for co-construction: Methodology

As a consequence of the parental meetings, it was postulated that developing dialogue and intersubjectivity between practitioner and parent could not be achieved through the use of a single home-school communication artefact, however many adaptations were made to this tool. The desire expressed by parents to share in teachers' expertise, the differing levels of enthusiasm shown for existing communication tools and the misconceptions regarding Pre-Nursery pedagogy, indicated that more extensive practice change would be required to create the clearer image of our pedagogy now seen as crucial to the co-construction of understanding. Hence, the inquiry could no longer focus solely on the redevelopment and use of the Learning Journey. Although the case study would remain focused on interactions between practitioner and parents within a single class across the duration of a single academic year, additional home-school communication tools and strategies would need to be included if there was any hope of gaining illumination on the potential for the co-construction of understanding between home and school.

Enhancing the potential for co-construction: data collection

The parental meetings prompted an array of adaptations to existing home-school communication tools. On one level this could be regarded as evidence of a form of 'partnership working' (DfE, 2012, p.3) between home and school. Nonetheless, the research question focused on the development of a shared understanding with parents specifically about their child's learning. In this respect these adapted tools and strategies were not regarded as data for analysis, but rather as a refined methodology to investigate the potential for the co-construction of understanding between practitioner and parent about the child as a learner. Consequently, data relating specifically to the co-construction of understanding would need to be collected and analysed. The creation of more opportunities for face-to-face interaction within the proposed changes meant that vast amounts of potential data could be produced. However, to attempt to record all face-to-face interaction would have been

intrusive, could have impeded the dialogue and would have been incredibly difficult to undertake. In addition, it had been postulated that to move beyond a fleeting and momentary intersubjectivity, the potential for co-construction had to be embedded within home-school communication tools. Thus, in addition to the on-going reflective diary kept by myself, it was decided that the focus of data collection would be those artefacts that recorded reciprocal communication between home and school, namely the Red Book, Learning Journey and e mail.

Enhancing the potential for co-construction: ethical considerations

Once it was understood that Phase Two would require an expansion of the research focus, the research population (that is the Pre –Nursery cohort of 2011/2012 and all FS staff) were immediately updated by letter or verbally. The parents who had participated within the original discussions had already given their permission for the inclusion of the Learning Journey as data. However, further permission was now sought to allow the collection and analysis of data from the Red Book and e mail (See Appendix 6 and 7). Somewhat surprisingly, out of a potential population of 30 families, 26 gave permission to use their Red Book and Learning Journey for inclusion within the study and 23 gave their permission to use their Red Book, Learning Journeys and e mails.

All FS staff and relevant school management were made aware of the proposal to widen the focus of the inquiry. Being at the centre of the study, the results and conclusions arising from the parental meetings were discussed in depth with Pre-Nursery staff, albeit anonymously. However, since the development of the team teaching approach outlined in Chapter Two, discussion, reflection and practice change had become an accepted part of the thrice weekly Pre-Nursery team meetings. Thus any adaptations to practice (resulting from the parental meetings or not) were part of this normal routine, jointly constructed and acceptable to the whole Pre-Nursery team. Nonetheless, further clarification and verbal permission was sought and gained prior to the inclusion of any of these adaptations within this narrative. Furthermore, all staff were given the opportunity to review my interpretation of the data.

Enhancing the potential for co-construction: theoretical considerations

Prior to the parental meetings, it was feared that the process of scaffolding may disempower parents by placing the teacher in the role of the professional expert and sidelining parental knowledge as 'other' (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000, p.242). Consequently, the focus of the research was the attempted co-construction of understanding between practitioner and parent through the redevelopment and use of the Learning Journey. However, the process of scaffolding was now understood to be more complex and a vital pre-cursor to meaningful dialogue. The confidence shown by parents and their recognition of the situated nature of professional expertise was incredibly empowering and could be used to support the co-construction of understanding. However, many misconceptions regarding the Pre-Nursery curriculum became apparent within the parental meetings. These could be seen as evidence of an inadequate knowledge of the 'other' (Buber, 1947, p.7) and could lead to cultural chauvinism, marginalisation or the denial of differing cultural assumptions (Heyward, 2002; Bronson and Merryman, 2009, Poore, 2005) and thus impede dialogue. That these misconceptions existed within those parents most involved within the Pre-Nursery (and thus potentially most informed of its pedagogy) was worrying. It highlighted that current home-school strategies were failing to communicate our philosophy, even to our most enthusiastic parents. Thus instead of disempowering parents, increasing parental understanding of the Pre-Nursery pedagogy through a process of scaffolding, may be the crucial first step in 'turning toward' (Buber, 1947, p.7) each other and building the trust and rapport (Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Genat, 2009) necessary for the co-construction of meaning.

It was highly unlikely that a greater understanding of our pedagogy could be achieved through the use of a single artefact, namely the Learning Journey. Utilising a range of differing tools and strategies, however, could create a more meaningful 'image' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.361) of our practice. Nonetheless, to succeed our current strategies had to be improved. The parental meetings indicated that individualised information presented within a meaningful context (Donaldson, 1978) was preferred and its content more likely to be retained, a point reiterated within Hughes and Greenhough (2006). Factors such as teacher workload would prevent the personalisation of all communication. Nevertheless, ways were sought to enhance the scaffolding potential of existing tools by making the information they contained more significant to parents. Although potentially 'authoritative' (Bakhtin, 1981,

p.346), it was hoped that a deepened understanding of parental need would create a clearer ‘image’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p.301) of our pedagogy. The interconnection between this pedagogy and home learning practices could then be invited, either through differing use of the same tools or through the inclusion of tools with more dialogic potential.

As a class teacher within a large institution with an established structure of responsibility and control, the ability to instigate change within communication tools would be limited. Nonetheless, as noted by Hedegaard (2012), individual ‘motives and competencies’ influence interaction within the ‘specific plane’ and thus tool use within *this* plane was within my immediate influence. Hence, although many of the adaptations remained isolated within the Pre-Nursery and thus did not reflect the school wide consistency in home-school interactions advocated by Goodall et al, (2011), they could still allow me to gain a greater understanding of the potential for co-construction within this plane. Furthermore, the affordances and constraints of existing communication tools had never been fully explored and thus minor adaptations to existing tools and strategies could influence enduring change even, perhaps, beyond the specific plane of interaction.

Enhancing the potential for co-construction: practice adaptation

Although not subjected to a detailed analysis, the adaptations undertaken as a consequence of the parental meetings shaped home-school interaction during the study year and are thus regarded as part of the research methodology. They are briefly described below in order to contextualise the subsequent findings and analysis. Consent was sought from all relevant parties prior to their inclusion.

Reflecting on existing practice, it was noted that the school already engaged with parents in variety of ways (See Table 8). However, the extent and variety of communication had its own complications. For example, prioritising events for attendance or retaining the most relevant information. It was clear from Phase One that parents were more enthusiastic when information was presented in a timely and meaningful manner, but curricula and procedural

information was often sent at the beginning of the year in the form of a yearly overview (See Figure 1). Consequently, attempts were made to contextualise and personalise information transference in the hope that this would increase its efficacy and encourage further reciprocity. This was done through adaptations in a range of strategies including Open Mornings, parental and nanny workshops, the Pre-Nursery ‘soft start’, planning, the Red Book, the Learning Journey and the class blog. These are outlined in turn below.

<u>Primary School Communication Tool (information sharing – school to parent)</u>	<u>Primary School Communication Tool (information sharing – parent to school)</u>	<u>Primary School Communication Tool (information sharing – potentially reciprocal)</u>
Parent Inductions – annual parental meetings that outline the curriculum and procedures in each year group	Admissions Forms – requests personal and learning information from parents	Introductory parental meetings – informal meeting between teacher and parent to share information
Year Group Welcome Booklet – shares curricula and procedural information		The FS Learning Journey
Parent Teacher Group Magazine – termly magazine from PTG sharing news and events		Open Mornings.
Biannual Progress Reports		Biannual Teacher -Parent Consultations
Weekly Year Group Newsletter – electronic newsletter sharing news and procedural information		Workshops and Curricula Information Mornings - for example parent and nanny workshops
Weekly Whole School Newsletter - electronic newsletter sharing articles and stories from across school		Weekly Class Blog - shares information and photographs of the class
School website		E mail Communication
		Home – school communication book (The Red Book)
		Foundation Stage Class Books - pre-dates the blog and shares photographs and text

Table 8: Home-school communication tools used within the Pre- Nursery

Pre- Nursery - Yearly Overview	
Mathematical Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an awareness of number and counting through relevant and meaningful everyday experiences. • To understand the concept of size in practical situations. • To understand, respond to and use some positional language. • To notice meaningful patterns, similarities and differences within their environment. • To engage in sorting and classifying within their play and when tidying up and organising their own belongings. • To participate in and enjoy number and clapping rhymes. • To become aware that shapes and numbers have specific names and be introduced to these within a meaningful context. • That time can be organized into meaningful sequences and be introduced to these through the structure and sequencing of the day.

Figure 1: Extract from Welcome Booklet (2009)

Open Mornings

For a number of years prior to the research, staff organised termly Open Mornings wherein parents were invited to spend a few hours in the classroom with their children. When first instigated, the Open Mornings were seen as chance for parents to observe the teacher supporting their child's learning within a 'normal' working day. However, informal feedback from parents and staff indicated that this approach was unsuccessful. Parents were limited to a static role at the fringes of the class, observing an unsettled child and teacher struggle through an unnatural learning scenario. Hence, at the instigation of the research, the focus of the Open Mornings had changed to one wherein themed resources and activities were made available for the parents and children to utilise together. Nonetheless, the parental meetings indicated that this was also unsatisfactory, as there was now little opportunity for the parents to explicitly share in the teacher's expertise. Consequently, attempts were made to make the learning potential within the resources more explicit to parents. This was achieved through the inclusion of information cards and interaction with the teacher. The cards outlined the potential learning within the resources and included helpful indicators and possible learning questions whilst reiterating the flexibility inherent within the resources (See Figure 2). In addition, the learning potential within the environment was highlighted through the use of outdoor learning 'trails' (See Figure 3). Finally, to start and end each Open Morning, a carpet session was included wherein an aspect of our teaching and learning was modelled (such as story telling or singing/music). It was hoped that these additions would make the learning practices within the Pre-Nursery more explicit, provide parents with ideas

to support learning at home (as requested within the parental meetings) and encourage face-to-face interaction.

Learning Intention: sorting and ordering using various resources

Potential Learning Outcomes:

- To identify relationships between objects in the environment through ordering and selecting resources

Young children often sort and match objects in their play. Can you observe carefully and join in? You can use the following questions to help.

- I see that you have put.... with.....can you tell me why so that I can help?
- Can I help?

Things to look out for at this activity

Children attempting to work out what you want rather than making choices for themselves.

The children may not want to sort the toys at all; this does not mean that they are not learning they may be learning many other things. Please do not worry if their thinking takes them elsewhere. Join in and see where it may take you!

Figure 2: Extract from Open Morning table card

Thai sala opposite climbing frame.

Sit and listen carefully. What can you hear?

Outside canteen *Do you know what this building is used for? My favourite food is bananas; tell a friend all about your favourite food.*

Map near canteen.

Can you find where you are on the map? Ask for help if you need it.

Tree near the canteen entrance. *What an interesting habitat! Do you know what that means? I wonder who could live in here. Can you think of a creature that might like to live here? Tell a friend all about that creature.*

Figure 3: Example of questions used in outdoor learning trail

Parental and nanny workshops.

Building upon the analysis of the parental meetings, the original interactive format within the nanny and parental workshops (which had diminished over the years to be replaced by more teacher led presentation) was re-emphasised. This was supported by more exemplars for discussion, role modelling and more time for open- ended discussion. The feedback included many practical strategies based on these discussions (See Figure 4).

How to encourage children to eat healthily.

If children are fussy or picky eaters, offer them a very small amount of a new food before you offer their usual known and liked foods. Use lots of praise when anything new is tried.

Give children a limited choice from options which you have chosen- this gives them some feeling of control. For example ask, 'Do you want an apple or a banana?'

Try, whenever possible, to eat with the child so that you can model the appropriate behaviour.

จะสนับสนุนให้เด็กๆทานอาหารอย่างมีประโยชน์ต่อร่างกายอย่างไร

Figure 4: Extract from discussion booklet produced as feedback from workshops

The promotion of the Pre-Nursery 'soft start'

Prior to the onset of the research little co-operation had existed between the Admissions Departments and Pre-Nursery staff. However, converging desires to respond to parental need prompted a closer working relationship at the onset of the study. This co-operation focused on procedures for Pre-Nursery admission. The resulting changes included the proposal for flexible part time attendance within the Pre-Nursery, greater flexibility and individuality within the separation process and greater marketing thereof. In addition, the explicit sharing of Pre-Nursery pedagogy became central to the marketing and admission procedure. Consequently, a series of magazine articles and parental workshops aimed at new parents were devised. The most immediate benefit for research population was the active promotion of the Pre-Nursery 'soft start'.

Within this soft start, parents were encouraged to enter the environment, interact with their child and remain until both they and their child felt happy to separate. This replaced a system wherein parents were discouraged from entering the building, remained outside and left immediately upon registration, often causing unwarranted distress to both child and parent. This flexible start to the morning was individualised according to the perceived needs of the family. The regularity and duration of parental contact within the soft start meant that learning could be shared in a meaningful way through the use of personal anecdotes centered on their child. These anecdotes often led to reflection upon on the child's learning at home. However, there remained great discrepancy in parental involvement, as some children arrived

in school via the school bus service whilst others were accompanied by their nannies, most of whom spoke a language other than English. Although the soft start had been in place for at least two years prior to the research, closer co-operation with Admissions at the onset of the research meant that it was actively promoted prior to children entering the Pre-Nursery to enable working parents to benefit accordingly, including the cohort at the centre of the research. Within the year of the inquiry more parents than ever took advantage of our 'soft start', thus greater communication was established from the very start of their child's school life.

Pre-Nursery blog and newsletter

As a consequence of the parental meetings, the 'scaffolding' potential of tools such as the class blog, newsletter, photo booklets and class e mails were consciously enhanced. These tools were already being used to give parents insight into their child's school day through the use of photographs and/or narrative. These had all been discussed positively within the parental meetings. However, it was realised that the narrative accompanying the photographs was predominantly descriptive and did not explicitly reveal the pedagogical relevance of the activities shown. For example, within a class photo book a photograph was accompanied by the written comment, 'A is enjoying using the shiny cloth as a blanket, whilst B builds herself a house' (excerpt from 2009). A newsletter from 2010 stated 'We have had lots of fun playing in the garden and 'Bob the Builder' has been very busy helping us mend the house near the sand pit.' Consequently, the narrative was re-focused to explicitly outline the learning involved. Within the blog in particular, additional extension activities and suggestions were also included and parents were encouraged to share these with their children (See Figures 5 and 6). It was hoped that these adaptations would encourage interaction within children's learning at home, enhance meaningful information transference between home and school, support a learning dialogue between parent and child and satisfy parental desire for a 'glimpse' into their children's world. The vocabulary and language style used within the blog, newsletter and other written communication reflected the level of English articulated within the meetings. However, this could have alienated those parents less confident in their use of English.

To avoid work overload, the newsletter, blog and photo stories (which were changed weekly) all had the same theme. Although for some parents this meant a repetition of information, it had been noted within the parental meetings that most parents only regularly accessed school information through their favoured form of communication. Accordingly, repeating information within all modes meant that crucial information could be given to all parents in their preferred medium. Although FS staff had in the past requested a streamlining of communication strategies, at this point the Primary Leadership Team had made no decision on this issue. By using a central theme for all of these strategies, workload could be lessened whilst retaining choice for parents.

Pre-Nursery: We Play! We Think! We Learn!

Colourful Creations

Published Tuesday, May 29, 2012

Last updated: Tuesday, May 29, 2012

Creative activities play a crucial role in children's learning. Not only do they help children develop an understanding of the importance of symbols in communication –vital for both reading and mathematics they also contribute towards the development of the fine motor skills necessary for writing and other manipulative activities. This is all achieved whilst simultaneously being a source of extreme pleasure for the children which in turn fosters concentration and builds self-esteem. It should not then be a surprise that children of Pre-Nursery age can happily paint all day, every day – as the pictures below show.



Figure 5: Example of Blog post

Pre-Nursery: Where the journey starts.....

This week brings more fun and frolics

When you look around the Pre-Nursery, you may wonder why it looks the way it does.

Why, for example, are there coloured mats to help us place the cups and plates in a particular order?



Why are there lots of labelled baskets with small amounts of certain toys placed within them?



The answer is to help the children to tidy up all by themselves.

It may seem that such care and time spent to help children tidy up is wasted time. In fact, however, tidying up is a crucial 'learning moment' for a young child that assists their cognitive development.

Mathematical thinking is based upon organizing the world around us into complex categories. What better way to start this process than sorting and replacing all those different toys! Carefully replacing toys into their correct places encourages children to look carefully at objects and make decisions about the similarities and differences between them. Looking carefully and making connections also assists in a child's literacy skills, as reading certainly requires a high degree of competence in both these skills. In addition, tidying up for themselves can promote independence and a sense of pride in their own achievements, as well as respect for their environment; all crucial aspects of lifelong learning.

Encouraging your child to tidy up at home, however, may seem like a daunting task, but having clearly labelled storage boxes for different types of toys and using very specific instructions and lots of targeted praise can really help. Asking your child how they would like to sort their toys can also help. For many children our 'adult' categories do not suit, as some may prefer to put toy 'friends' together rather than all the sea creatures perhaps.

Have a go at home and if you photograph any instances of wonderful tidying they can be added to the blog just to instill that little extra sense of pride! Happy Tidying!

Figure 6: Example of Blog post

New planning formats.

Parental involvement within learning requires a high level of commitment from both home and school (Harris and Goodall, 2008). As a consequence of the parental meetings, it was understood that unless parental contributions were visibly incorporated within the teaching and learning, even the most involved parent might not persevere. Moreover, although advocated by academics and policy makers (DfE, 2012; Tickell, 2011), if seen as additional to their normal workload, teachers may also lack enthusiasm for ‘partnership working’ (DfE, 2012, p.3). Davey (2011) argues that, due to competing pressures, certain curricula aspects only become central to teaching and learning when they are included within the assessment and reporting framework. Consequently, a decision was made to review how we incorporated observational assessments (including parental observations) into our planning (See Figure 7 for assessment grid prior to adaptation).

Pre-Nursery Foundation Profile		
Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy		
Numbers as labels and for counting	Calculating	Shape, space and measures
Is willing to handle materials.	Sorts and replaces equipment appropriately during tidy up times.	Uses shapes to create their own simple structures and arrangements.
Says some number names in familiar contexts such as nursery rhymes.	Organises and arranges toys in a particular way during play.	Beginning to talk about the shape of everyday objects.
Says some counting words randomly.	Recognises similarities and differences between objects during play.	Enjoys filling and emptying containers.
Uses some number language such as ‘more’ and ‘a lot’.		Is willing to attempt jigsaw puzzles.
Recites some number names in sequence.		
Uses some number names accurately in play.		

Figure 7: Assessment grid for Pre- Nursery (2009)

Prior to the parental meetings, it had been thought that parental expectations for their children would focus on ‘academic’ skills. (See Appendix 3) However, this was found to be erroneous and led us to conclude that changing our planning and assessment may, in fact, enhance dialogue. Consequently, a new planning and assessment format was devised based upon observational information (including parental observations) which was to be used as the basis of our thrice weekly team meetings. Learning from the amalgamation of the two Pre-Nurseries, this tool was co-constructed by the whole Pre-Nursery team. As radical change was not possible, the new document remained within the overall framework of the EYFS,

(DSCF, 2008) but also drew on other influences such as The Scales of Well-being and Involvement developed by Laevers et al (2005) as well as the IB Learner Profile (IBO, 2013). Furthermore, it drew on staff understanding of this particular context. Until this point, many aspects of our daily practice had remained implicit within our planning, these were now made explicit. Perhaps of most import was an extended section on bi-lingual language development (it was felt that our previous assessment, drawn from the EYFS [DSCF, 2008] disadvantaged the EAL children within our setting, a point reiterated by Bradbury, 2013). Although our representation within the specific plane (Hedegaard, 2012) was bounded by the rules and conventions (Engestrom, 2001) within the general institutional plane (Hedegaard, 2012), reflecting Davey (2011) it was hoped that by making implicit elements of our practice explicit they would remain at the forefront of interactions between staff and children, as well as between school and home.

The boundaries placed on our redeveloped artefact meant that it was organised in a familiar way, being loosely structured around the EYFS (See Figure 8 for excerpt). However, the size and organisation of the document (a number of A3 size pages arranged into a booklet) whilst including 'checklist' prompts, encouraged the use of observational information which could be annotated directly on the sheets. Used as the basis for team discussions about the child, it was hoped that this format could create a comprehensive picture of the child from a wide range of sources and thus enhance the role of team and parental information within our planning. In turn, the document could form the central focus of communication with parents. Admittedly parental involvement remained reliant on the Pre-Nursery staff to incorporate their views. Nonetheless, this was a step towards greater recognition of parental knowledge. Prior to its implementation, approval for the new assessment format was sought and gained from the Primary Leadership Team.

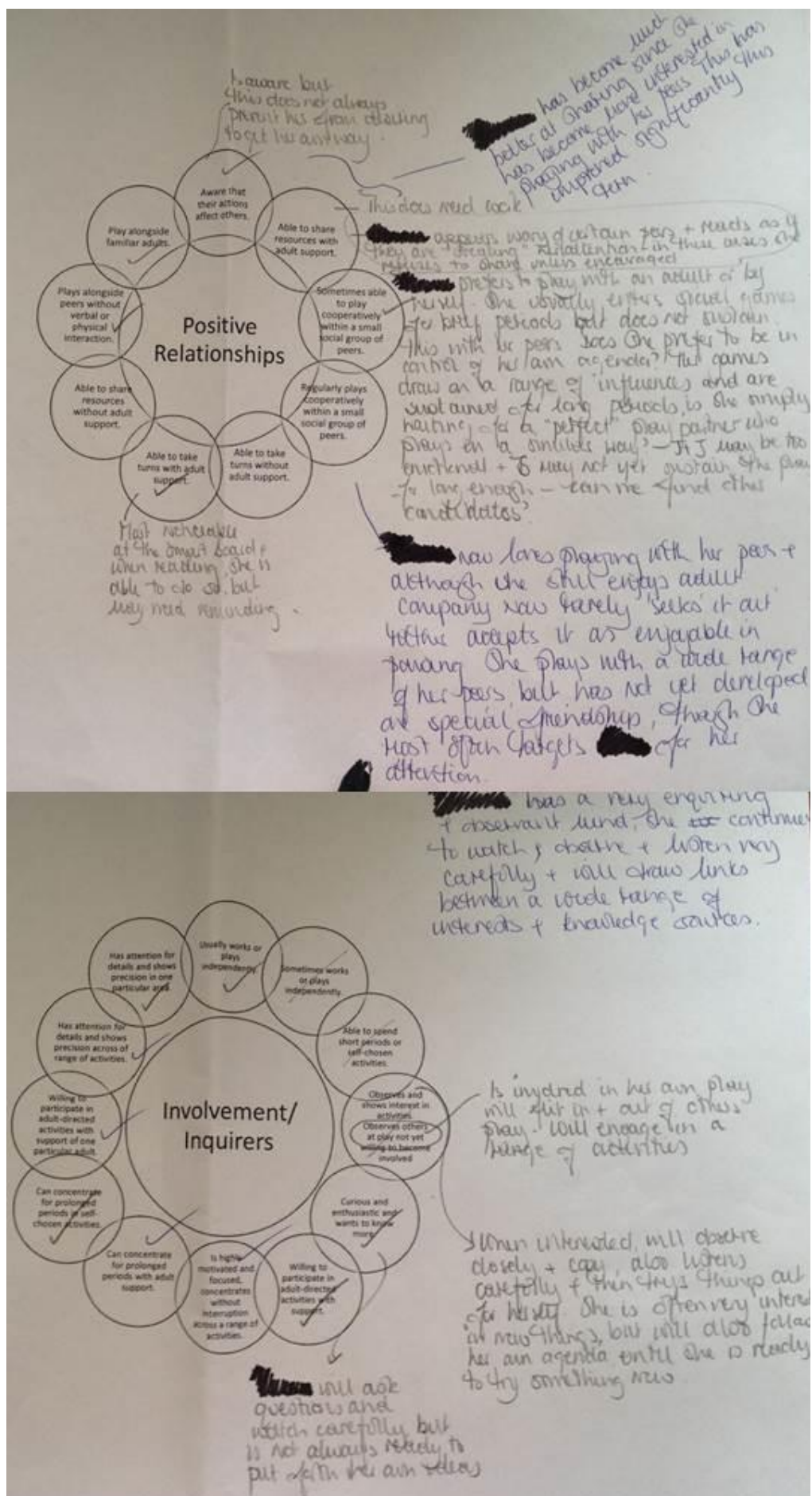


Figure 8: Revised planning and assessment grid for Pre- Nursery (Excerpt)

Red Book.

The parental meetings indicated that the Red Book was an extremely important communication tool. Accordingly, it was decided to refocus its use from predominantly procedural messages (See Figure 9) to emphasise its potential for sharing personal and anecdotal information on individual learning. This was done in response to parents declared affection for the Red Book and their desire to learn more about how it could be used. It was hoped that by modelling its use in this way, parents may overcome any inhibitions over its use noted within the meetings. The potential to reflect learning at home and in school made the Red Book central to the research, thus specific permission was sought for its inclusion as data (See Appendix 6).

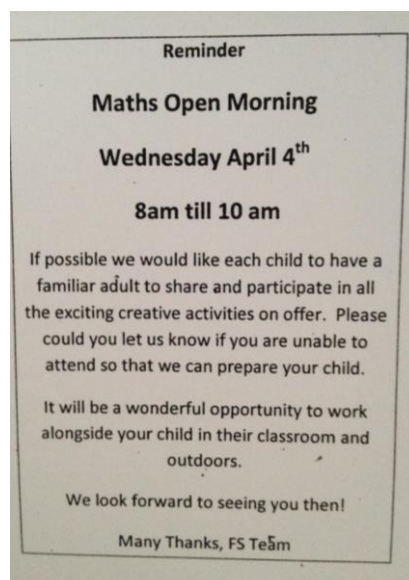


Figure 9: Example of procedural notice commonly used in Red Book

The Learning Journey.

The Learning Journey had been the initial focus of the study. Although its centrality had been reassessed, it was important that the results of the parental meetings were fed back to staff. A FS Staff meeting was held wherein feedback was shared, parental suggestions discussed and a number of adaptations decided (See Figure 10). Although, the scope for radical change was limited, it was agreed that the Pre-Nursery Learning Journey could reflect

the new planning and assessment format rather than previous documentation. In addition, it was recognised that the presentation of the Learning Journey may have been too formal, with typed observations presented within a grid (See Figure 11). Consequently, the parental suggestion of an informal ‘scrap book’ was proposed. Although, this was rejected at this point as too radical a change (it has since been adopted but only in conjunction with a formal written report) a degree of informality was introduced wherein narratives were supplemented with annotated examples of children’s creations. Furthermore, staff drew up pointers for use that would allow teachers to individualise each Learning Journey whilst retaining a degree of uniformity; consistency being regarded as important (Goodall et al, 2011). As requested, it was decided that parents could access their Learning Journey at any point and that they would be sent home prior to parental consultations rather than after (as previously). Finally, to share the philosophy and intentions of the Learning Journey changes with parents, an information morning was instigated.

‘Review of Learning Journeys’ Meeting
 8 March - Notes taken by [REDACTED]

Ways Forward

- This term 2 fully annotated entries per child by the teacher, next term 1 piece per child
- Include other examples of significant moments/ work with annotations
- More towards large scrap book style portfolio next years in which ‘post its’, labels and large work can easily be included
- Parents will be informed at the beginning of the school year about their role i.e. adding items and sharing it with their child and teacher
- Pre-Nursery can utilise new reporting and assessment framework as basis for comments
- We will look for ways to make it less time consuming and ways to make it a working document which is incorporated into our practice
- We will clearly have the focus that this is a celebration of the child’s progress
- Snapshots and snippets of learning are important as well as the inclusion of annotated “Journeys”
- Make Learning Journeys available to parents upon request
- Learning Journeys must be sent home prior to parental consultations.
- We need to share these with Y1 and Y2 and look towards how they will follow up on the journeys
- The journeys will be used in the discussion at the beginning of the new school year with the next teacher and parents – they can then take them home to keep
- For the next term and a half, staff can include labels and different aspects of the child’s learning
- A rolling programme of seeing parents rather than a set conference time so we can see them when relevant would support the ethos of the journeys better.

Figure 10: Excerpt from Review of Learning Journey meeting

<h1>My Learning Journey</h1> <p>Term 1 2010/2011 – [REDACTED]</p>	<h2>Learning Experienced</h2>
<div data-bbox="327 383 847 770"> </div> <p>Indoor play observation 11th October 2010 Present [REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED] is inside playing at the sand tray with [REDACTED] and one other child. She is chatting to [REDACTED] in Thai and repeating the English words used by [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] fills the bottles with sand using a small scoop.</p> <p>"Watch me, look at this", (In Thai to [REDACTED]) pouring sand through the sand wheel. [REDACTED] repeats the task again.</p> <p>"Why is it cold?" She asks [REDACTED]. "Is it because of the air con?" (All in Thai) Carries on filling and pouring sand into the small bottles.</p> <p>"There is no one climbing the steps" (Thai) indicating the lego steps placed in the sand.</p> <p>Looks in the box full of sand toys and finds a large filling and pouring toy - "Big" she says in English and Thai.</p> <p>"Are you ready?" [REDACTED] asks her whilst pouring the sand through a sieve. "Ready" she replies in English. Another child tries to take away her scoop but she says "No" in English and keeps a firm grip in the scoop.</p> <p>She explores the sieve whilst pouring through the holes in both sides. "1,2,3" (English) .</p> <p>Overall [REDACTED] spends twenty minutes exploring the same filling and pouring activity.</p> <p>Comment</p> <p>This observation shows that [REDACTED] is able to concentrate for prolonged periods of time in self chosen activities and is interested in exploring the world using her senses. It also shows that she is beginning to make connections between different ideas and use these</p>	<p>PSE Usually works or plays independently</p> <p>CLL Verbally initiates and maintains conversation with children and adults in their preferred language. Is a confident speaker.</p> <p>PSRN Is willing to handle material. Says some number names in familiar contexts such as nursery rhymes. Enjoys filling and emptying containers.</p> <p>KUL Observes and shows interest in activities. Curious and enthusiastic and wants to know more. Shows and interest in why things happen.</p> <p>PD Engages in activities requiring hand/ eye coordination.</p>

Figure 11: Example of page from Learning Journey

Data Analysis

As the year progressed, many exciting changes in home-school interaction were noted. The extent of the initiatives and the enthusiasm of the parents created a vast pool of data for detailed analysis. It was understood that isolating the ‘necessary and jointly sufficient

conditions' (Hammersley, 2012p.401) to indicate causal relations between the

implementation of any of the adapted practices and subsequent interactions would be impossible. Nonetheless, the data might contain evidence of the co-construction of a shared understanding about the child. Jordan's (2004) definition of co-construction indicates the mutual negotiation of novel meaning. However, identifying that this had occurred would be incredibly difficult as it was unclear what this may look like. Theoretical reflection led to the hypothesis that within the context of this study, co-construction could be reflected in the development of a new 'image' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.361) of the child as a learner or even a new learning practice. However, it was also hoped that other relevant but unanticipated themes might emerge from the data. As within the analysis of the parental meetings both the purpose and assumptions of the research were brought to the fore. It was hoped that being fully cognizant of the 'preexisting conceptual lenses' (Anderson and Kragh, 2010, p.49) shaping the research might allow 'surprises' within the data to surface, whilst retaining the 'voice' of the participants (O'Hara et al, 2011). Consequently, an analysis of the Learning Journey, Red Book and e mail data from those parents who had given their permission was begun.

From the initial analysis a number of categories relating to the form of communication that took place between home and school began to emerge (See Table 10 for initial categories). The intention was to refine this initial analysis through a process of reiteration between data, theory and previous assumptions as within Phase One. Nonetheless during the initial analysis it became clear that there was one home-school relationship that would be of particular relevance to the research questions at the centre of this study. Consequently, a decision was made to focus the analysis on the interactions between myself and this particular parent (Parent Y). This decision was made because within this relationship an unprecedented level of communication was achieved. Furthermore, this communication focused predominantly on sharing information about Child X's learning rather than procedural exchanges and thus could be pivotal to the study (Bailey, 1992; Flyvbjerg, 2006) in that, if no indication of the co-construction of shared understanding could be found within this data then it was unlikely to be found in any other. Consequently, although data from the whole cohort is included as a comparison, data from Parent Y became the main focus of the analysis and thus forms the basis of the following narrative.

Background to Parent Y

Parent Y began her relationship with the school in Playgroup, which she attended with her youngest child prior to entering Pre-Nursery. Her child started Playgroup at 18months and began Pre-Nursery in August 2011 upon reaching 2.5 years. Parent Y immediately took an active role within the class and volunteered to be the Pre-Nursery Class Parent, wherein she organised class parties and class play dates out of school hours and assisted in the dissemination of information to parents about school events. Parent Y attended the Parental Meetings in Phase One and showed a keen interest in using all forms of home-school communication to reflect upon her child's learning at home and in school. The result was an unprecedented amount of home-school communication focusing on her child's learning (See Table 9 and Table 10).

Average number of e mails received per family: 14.5	Number of e mails received from Parent Y: 41
Average Number of red books fully completed per family: 0.7 books.	Number of Red Books fully completed by Parent Y: 3
Average frequency of written or e mail contact: once every three or four weeks	Average frequency of written or e mail contact with Parent Y: - every two or three days.

Table 9: Comparative analysis of home-school communication received during the study year

Parent Y's preferred form of communication was the Red Book and thus most of the data analysed drew from this tool. However, it also drew from the Learning Journey, e- mail contact and notes made within the planning and assessment documents. Prior to analysis of this data, further verbal and written permission was requested, as this form of analysis exceeded the permission given previously. Within this request a detailed explanation of the new analysis and purpose thereof was explained, the right to withdraw was reaffirmed, the safe storage of data were reassured as was anonymity. In addition, review of the analysis prior to presentation was offered. Parent Y remained keen and enthusiastic to support the research and full consent was given.

Category of mail.	Overall Number of mails.	Percentage of overall mail.	Number of mails in category sent by Parent Y	Percentage of mails in category sent by Parent Y
Routine requests about logistics, informing of absence etc.	133	51%	16*	12%
Parent initiated sharing of information about a child's learning at home (including photos or examples of work)	25	10%	11	44%
Specific requests for action related to a child's learning in school	18	7%	1	5%
Informal pleasantries initiated by parents	13	5%	2	15%
Miscellaneous requests for information about an aspect of learning.	8	3%	7	88%
Requesting course of action different than recommended by myself or school	3	1%	0	0%
Replies to e-mails sent by myself about their child which extend on the information contained within the initial mail	14	5%	1	7%
Responses acknowledging receipt of information sent about their child (including pleasantries)	47	18%	3	6%
Total e mails	261		41	16%

Table 10: Comparison of e mail communication between home and school.

*The relatively high number of procedural e mails sent by Parent Y was related to her role as class parent. The Red Book was not used to convey this information.

Within the data analysis, evidence relating to the co-construction of understanding was sought. At the beginning of the analysis it was unclear what this may look like. Nonetheless, themes soon began to emerge. From the outset, communication from Parent Y focused on her child's learning at home. However, the nature of this communication changed as the year progressed and grew from one based simply on sharing observational narratives, to one wherein interactions altered home and school perceptions of Child X. In turn, this co-constructed image of Child X led to co-constructed courses of action. It also became clear that these co-constructed courses of action were based upon the integration of a range of home-school communication strategies, including those aimed at scaffolding parents into a better understanding of Pre-Nursery pedagogy. Within the following chapter these emerging themes will be used to shape the narrative.

Chapter Seven

Phase Two

Enhancing the potential for co-construction: findings

As noted above, Parent Y used a range of home-school tools to communicate regularly with the school. From the outset, this communication focused predominantly on Child X's learning rather than procedural exchanges. However, the shape of this communication changed from anecdotal information sharing to one wherein the interaction changed perceptions and shaped actions, both at home and in school. This could indicate that a degree of co-construction between home and school about Child X as a learner had been achieved. The narrative illustrates the interaction between Parent Y and the practitioner organised according to these themes. The integrated use of tools and strategies will also be outlined before the implications of the findings will be contemplated.

Findings

Within a few weeks of Child X starting school, Parent Y began using the Red Book to share observations of Child X's learning at home and draw links with her learning at school.

Sep 28th 2011

There was a paper cut out of a shark in her bag – she says you gave it to her – so she pretended to have the shark bite my finger, then she kissed my finger and put a bandage on it! Then she asked me to have the shark bite her finger, kiss her finger etc. I believe it's something she's been doing in school. Is that correct?

Jan 10th 2012

X was demonstrating a balancing pose (one hand and one foot on the floor, one hand and one foot in the air) as taught By Miss B... She was also trying to float in the bath tub like a star fish – Is this something she was taught in swimming? I wonder where that is from!

Parent Y also began reflecting on and enhancing information supplied by me about X's learning and offering her own interpretations of these experiences. In reply to an entry from me about X waiting patiently and asking politely to talk about her Grandfather, Parent Y notes:

Jan 12th 2012

We do try and encourage her to raise her hand and say "Can I, may I say something?" when her father and I are talking, instead of just talking loudly (shouting!) for our attention, so I'm glad she tried to do the same with you. Did she say "Yeye" (Chinese term for paternal Grandfather) or actually Grandfather? X usually calls her paternal grandfather "Yeye", Funny if she uses the English term in school – I guess she knows then, that Chinese isn't spoken in school?

The sharing of anecdotal observations of home learning continued on a regular basis throughout the year:

May5th

When we read or sing 'The Ten Pink Piglets on a Wall' book, I encourage her to guess or count how many piglets are left. When we get to the 'One pink piglet walking on a wall' bit, she changes the words to 'running on a wall' which is quite observant of her! (The pig in the book is running).

Most contributions were brief anecdotes. However some were much larger and very detailed. For example after a holiday, it was not unusual to receive two A4pages of typed description of their experience. (These have not been included as data as they contained a high degree of personal information.)

In addition to offering observational anecdotes, Parent Y also began to communicate about events occurring outside of school that may affect Child X's learning within school.

March 14th

I am glad to her that X did not mention the hospital today. We were there again today but her Grandpa was much better. I think she misses her dad more than

anything since we had to leave him there again and X kept saying that she is sad and misses him. We sang silly, made up songs to make her feel better!

May 5th

No swimming for X today – she has pinkeye (bacterial kind, not the viral type) and has been taking medicine for it. The doctor says she can go to school as it is not the contagious kind. We told her that this is why she should always wash her hands! She has been very good taking her medicine because “It’s yummy!”

Furthermore, this exchange of information began to prompt attitudinal change at home and in school, which resulted in documented changes in action. For example, communication regarding the use of floats within swimming lessons prompted a change of action in school.

September 9th

Me: X was very confident and independent in the pool today; she was also determined to dress herself again. I asked her if she wanted to take off her arm floats, as she is ready for the next step. However, she was not keen so I left it. I will keep gently trying though as soon they may stop her from taking that next step.

September 26th

Parent Y: X said that she didn’t wear the floats today, then she said she wore them, so I just wanted to check if indeed she wore them!

Me: She wore her arm floats again today but I will start asking her (to remove them) again after half term as then we will have a longer time to work on her water confidence in our pool.

September 28th

Thank you. I know that she is not scared of the water (she jumps in on her own) but for whatever reason – she’s probably just enjoying floating with the arm bands! I don’t want to force her so I appreciate your gradual nudging/encouragement.

Me: That is good to know.

After receiving this information from home, the next swimming lesson Child X was persuaded to remove the arm floats and they were never used again. Instead Child X was taught to float independently. This was fed back to Parent Y via the Red Book.

This modified action was instigated by myself in response to parental communication and occurred very early on in the relationship. Due to my deep involvement within the research, this might be regarded as insufficient evidence of co-construction. Nonetheless, subsequent dialogue resulted in negotiation and further changes to actions both at home and in school. Evidence of this was found within a series of interactions concerning Child X's response to certain television characters.

November 16th

Parent Y: At home X told me a few times that she doesn't like Pingu and that she likes 'real penguins'. I am not sure what will happen when you show Pingu in the future but I will try and talk to her about it.

Me: If we watch it again I will talk to her also!

November 27th

Parent Y: When I picked X up last Friday she said that she didn't like the video that she watched after lunch - I cannot remember what it was! She seems to get scared easily by the videos lately, I am not sure why.

Me: It is funny that X is very fearless in many ways and is so worried about the video. It could be just a phase. Children do seem to go through a phase when their imagination makes many things suddenly seem scarier than before. I will keep an eye on her to see if there is any clue as to what in particular triggers it.

December 5th

Me: We started watching The Snowman today and X did not like it, so she went and helped Miss L in the classroom.

December 6th

Parent Y: I will also borrow "The Snowman". Is the animation of the Snowman similar to Pingu?

Me: ... *The Snowman and Pingu* are quite different as *Pingu* is plasticine animation, so I am not really sure what the connection is I am afraid!

December 8th

Parent Y: *Once again X did not want to watch "The Snowman" this morning when I dropped her off. I think it is best to leave it as that for now - if she doesn't want to watch, just let her do something else which she seems to be doing. My husband and I are not big TV watchers In that book "Into the mind of Babes" it mentions something about kids not being able to distinguish TV from reality till a certain age (Is it 5 years?, 7? I can't remember) so we are not 100% sure that letting her watch more than what she watches now will help her from being scared (This is in response to a verbal suggestion from me that watching TV together to talk it through may help X. However this strategy was adopted later- see Feb 5th) It is strange that she likes *Maisy* but not *Pingu*, though! She does see *Pingu* at the mall and points him out to me but has never acted afraid of him.*

Me: *My daughter has a *Pingu* toy at home. I will try and bring it in for X to play with - if my daughter lets me!*

January 31st

Parent T: *I borrowed a *Pingu* DVD from the library today but could not get it to work tonight - maybe tomorrow. X saw the DVD case and was keen to watch it actually - she didn't seem afraid of it or against it.*

February 5th

*We watched a few *Pingu* episodes yesterday, she was not scared. In fact, when she saw the DVD case she got excited and kept asking for it - perhaps because she was in the comfort of her home or rather, because we were with her and talked about the show. (X's father) said that he found some of the parts creepy (I did not see all the episodes) like when *Pingu* dances his head separates! I also think that because there is no dialogue, it is harder for children to understand/ make sense of it – maybe that is the reason why X does not like it in school. At home she was fine. I don't like how *Pingu's* dad smokes a pipe though.*

Me: Pingu is a more complex program than some others aimed at little ones, especially as Pingu can actually be very naughty. As such, it is very good (as you say) to talk about it as you watch it. We have not watched it since before Christmas but if we do again, I will make sure that we carefully select the episode and allow time for a chat as well!

Both these particular conversations were ongoing over a prolonged period of time and the negotiated response was continuously altered according to renewed perceptions of need.

Furthermore, Parent Y also began to request advice across a range of issues, thus explicitly seeking to share in my professional expertise and use this to shape learning at home. Interestingly, Parent Y expanded this dialogue beyond the immediate relationship when she sought advice on developing positive relationships between X and her younger cousin who had no relationship with the school.

May 22nd

We talked about pushing several times during the break because her younger smaller cousin keeps pushing or hitting her. He also bit her a few days ago! I'm not sure how to handle this and would love to chat to you about it. It happens all the time and I don't want X to think it is ok.

Nonetheless, expertise was not just sought by also supplied. At the very beginning of the year (September 2011), Parent Y supplied the school with two contemporary books on research into young children's learning, one on children's development (Bronson and Merryman, 2009) and one on research into young children's television viewing (Guernsey, 2006). Both these books formed the basis of discussion for future action and one in particular was referred to and used to counter a course of action suggested by myself (see Red Book excerpt from December 8th above).

The data utilised above was drawn solely from the Red Book. Within the parental meeting that Parent Y attended, the Red Book was discussed very favourably, perhaps leading to Parent Y's intensive use of this tool. Nonetheless, Parent Y utilised a wide range of tools and

strategies, the data revealing the integration of their use to shape perceptions and actions by school and parent. For example, an entry on the Planning and Assessment document from Term 1 states

X prefers to play with an adult or by herself. She usually enters social games for brief periods but does not sustain this with her peers. Does she prefer to be in control of her own agenda? Her games draw on a range of influences and are sustained for long periods, is she simply waiting for the 'perfect' play partner who will play in a similar way? A and B may be too emotional and C may not yet sustain the play for long enough – can we find other candidates?

This concern, although not fed back in this format to Parent Y, was reflected in a Term 1 Learning Journey entry that stated:

Term 1

X is just on the cusp of integrating her friends into her play at a deeper level. It would be great to see this continue next term. It would also be great to see X share both her play ideas and her play resources with her friends more readily. Presently her independent spirit may be preventing her from realising the full benefits of co-operation, although X is making progress in this area. (This entry was accompanied by a selection of photographs to illustrate these statements.)

Parent Y responded to this with a comment stating:

It is lovely to see X developing in school. We are trying to enhance her learning at home and outside, particularly with how she relates to other children: her brother, cousin, playmates outside of school.

This resulted in action from Parent Y which was reflected in the Red Book.

January 14th

By the way we have set a play date for the Nursery parents/kids at the Funarium Could you kindly help me insert these invites in the school bags (Red Books)?

In Term 2 a further entry into the staff planning and assessment grid stated:

X now loves playing with her peers and although she still enjoys adult company, now rarely 'seeks it out' rather accepts it as enjoyable in passing. She plays with a wide range of her peers, but has not yet developed one special friendship, though she often targets Z for attention.

This was then fed back to Parent Y via the Red Book ...

February 19th

X has found a new friend in Z, they played together fantastically today. If it is at all possible, it may be good to arrange a play date together.

and the Learning Journey.

Term 2

Last term X often preferred to play by herself. Now, however, she is very sociable and whereas last term she would play with her peers only if they were doing something that she was interested in, she will now seek out particular friends to play with.

This resulted in a further course of action from Parent Y:

March 11th

X started off her weekend with a lovely play date with Z. They played well together even as both would 'pretend' to be different characters.

This burgeoning friendship was supported within the Pre-Nursery wherever possible and regular updates on current friendship interests were given throughout the year. In turn, this encouraged the extension of this and other friendships beyond the classroom, not always easy within an international school wherein students may live in a wide geographical area.

In addition, within the Red Book, further evidence was found of the integration of tools and strategies, including those tools and strategies adapted to 'scaffold' parents into a greater understanding of Pre-Nursery pedagogy. Parent Y explicitly used these to support learning at home and in turn shared this learning via the Red Book, Learning Journey and e mail (often sending photographs of learning as it occurred).

March 12th 2012

X is into tidying up these days, which is lovely. On Sunday we got a new shelf/drawer storage for the children's toys and she (as suggested in the Pre-Nursery blog) decided what to store in which drawers. I do think it has helped her to want to tidy up more! We will also add labels to them.

April 4th

We enjoyed the Open Morning today. It took us a long time to figure out that the Math Trail entailed venturing beyond the Foundation Stage gates but we did eventually stumble upon numbers 2-10! The questions suggested were very useful and I look forward to using them wherever we are out and about, or even just at home.

This information was in turn, discussed within planning meetings and significant learning reflected in the planning and assessment documentation. Regular communication continued throughout the whole academic year with very little fluctuation in the frequency of contact which occurred on average every two or three days and continued to reflect current learning at home and school.

Discussion

Within the Literature Review it was noted that 'partnership working' (DfE, 2012, p.3) may depend upon developing a reciprocal relationship between home and school focusing on the child. In the analysis above there are indications that this occurred. Firstly, there was evidence that communication between home and school resulted in a new and shared understanding about Child X as a learner. Furthermore, in some cases this led to a co-constructed course of action. In addition, advice was sought but also given by both parties, indicating a deep level of trust seen by many as essential in an egalitarian exchange (Genat, 2009; Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Bohm, 1996; Buber, 1947). Also, Parent Y clearly expresses her appreciation of the efforts made to 'scaffold' parents into the Pre-Nursery pedagogy and readily uses the knowledge gained to support learning at home; the consequences of which are fed back to staff to further enhance their understanding of Child X as a learner.

As noted earlier, the amount of communication between home and school encountered within this relationship was unprecedented within a twenty year career as an Early Years Specialist. In addition, the range and depth of information about X's learning was unusual. In past experience, daily communication between home and school focused predominantly on procedural information such as absence, illness or the sharing of information about upcoming events. Subsequently, communication about the child as the learner is often restricted to those highly ritualized events described by Marsico et al (2013) such as parent's evenings. Parent Y's communication, however, remained fully focused upon X's learning. The choice to respond to this information remains, of course, with the individual practitioner. However, once seen it cannot help but shape the conceptual lens (Anderson and Kragh, 2010, p.49) through which one views the child. In this case, parental contributions were consciously used in staff discussions and incorporated into planning and assessment documents. Subsequently they enabled the whole team to create a more detailed picture of Child X as a learner and were used to further support that learning in school before being fed back to Parent Y in an ongoing cycle.

Nevertheless, the degree of 'co-construction' that occurred may be queried. Perhaps the pertinent question may be whether or not these new practices challenged the participants' 'habits of thought' (Bohm, 1996, p.10) or whether they occurred because both were actually in alliance (Marsico et al, 2013) with each other from the start. After all, choosing a play partner based upon knowledge gained from a parent, although beneficial for the child, does not shake the foundations of Engestrom's rules and traditions (2001). Nonetheless, limitations to my professional expertise were acknowledged, hinting that a truly egalitarian co-construction of learning might have been possible. However, the questioning of my perspective was relatively minor and ways forward were easily accessible within the overall values of the Pre-Nursery. Larger challenges to professional values could be far trickier to negotiate, especially if rules and traditions within the general institutional plane or formal societal plane (Hedegaard 2012) constrain reciprocal responses. Thus, although evidence of a reciprocal relationship and the co-construction of understanding were found, this exemplar does not shed light on the potential for partnership working if larger cultural differences should emerge.

It was interesting that the relationship with Parent Y raised a very practical concern regarding ‘partnership working’. As noted previously, the frequency and duration of communication with Parent Y was unprecedented. Usually I received a Red Book entry from Parent Y every few days and sometimes every day. On some days I also received e mail correspondence. All correspondence received a reply on the same day – whether verbal, written or electronic. This was incredibly time consuming and could only be maintained because it was unusual. If all parents upheld a similar level of communication then, not only would the process be hard to sustain, but it may (from the teachers perspective at least) change from a positive, beneficial and enjoyable experience into a chore. The main concern was finding the time to write a reply in the Red Book during the school hours. Most often, Red Book entries were written whilst sitting with the children as they ate. Ironically, this meant that I was not able to reinforce the children’s table manners and independent eating – the very values that had prompted ‘dissonance’ (Allen, 2003) during the Parental Meetings. However, this time was seen by the Pre-Nursery team as the most convenient. Although responding to e mail correspondence was easier, it remained time consuming and no time was allocated by school management to this task. Thus if I had not been undertaking this study, responding to Parent Y may have come further down my list of priorities and the relationship may have floundered, a concern noted by Davy (2011) who argues that unless integral to the curriculum, aspirations of interculturalism may easily become sidelined by busy teachers.

Beyond Parent Y

The aim of this inquiry was to explore the potential for partnership working within an international school through the co-construction of understanding between parents and practitioner about the child as a learner. The findings within this chapter indicate that such co-construction is possible. However, as Parent Y was generally in alliance with Pre-Nursery pedagogy, this exemplar offered little illumination on engaging with parents with diverse and potentially differing views on education – an important motivation of the study.

Nonetheless, many changes in parental involvement were perceived throughout the parental cohort. These included a growth in Open Morning attendance (in previous years supervision was needed for children whose parents did not attend but this was not necessary this year), increased Red Book communication and a rise in parental attendance during the Pre-Nursery soft start. In addition, the blog was regularly viewed (evidenced by the number of recorded hits and the number of comments received). Furthermore, communication from a wide range of parents contained a high degree of dialogue about learning, rather than procedural enquiries. This was evident within all forms of interaction, verbal and written and led to a greater knowledge and understanding of the children as learners, both at home and school.

In addition, there appeared to be a growing sense of trust between parents and myself. This was perceived through a marked increase in parents seeking advice on a wide variety of topics. The most common query centered on the best way to enhance English language development. This could have been a potentially controversial topic as many parents were unfamiliar with our emphasis on encouraging bilingualism though the development of a strong home language and spoke broken English to their children at home. Nonetheless, our viewpoint was warmly received. Furthermore, discussions covered the whole gamut of home and school life with young children. Although such exchanges had taken place in previous years, they had been sporadic and limited in scope. Throughout the study year, however, the exchange of views and information became a regular occurrence with a wide range of parents. Dialogue about learning occurred most frequently within face-to-face interactions during the soft start, Open Mornings or at home time, but also occurred through written communication within the Red Book or e mail. The example noted above, wherein Parent Y asks for advice on a series of biting incidents between X and her cousin was typical of such exchanges.

Consequently Pre-Nursery staff were incredibly positive about the levels of parental engagement throughout the study year. Nonetheless, although many changes in parental involvement were perceived by Pre-Nursery staff, the impossibility of isolating the ‘necessary and jointly sufficient conditions’ (Hammersley, 2012, p.401) meant that no causal relationship between the adapted strategies and subsequent interactions could be claimed. At this point, a comparative analysis with parental engagement in previous years would have

been beneficial. However, the extension of the original research focus beyond the Learning Journey meant that, whilst previous years' Learning Journey data was available, Red Book, e mail or planning data was not. Thus, even finding evidence of a correlation between the two was unfeasible. Although this could be regarded as a flaw in the study, it clearly illustrates the difficulty of engaging in a dialogic and responsive relationship with parents (or children), whilst simultaneously attempting to create reliable statistics and comparable data, a point articulated within Chapter One with reference to the process of sustained shared thinking. Nevertheless, on a personal and professional level, the home-school interactions experienced throughout the duration of the study were certainly the most rewarding of my career thus far.

Underlying the research design was Cole's concept that a researcher should be a 'participant and an analyst' (1996, p.349) and use their systematic theoretical knowledge to 'help things grow' (p.349) in the context within which they are immersed. For Cole, the ability to 'create and sustain effective systems' (p.350) becomes evidence of a theory's adequacy. The data from Parent Y outlined above and the enthusiasm of the parental cohort throughout the year suggested that the tools and systems adapted and utilised throughout the study year positively impacted on practitioner and parent interaction. Furthermore, the positive engagement of parents within the Pre-Nursery was noted by other staff and resulted in the expansion of some of the adapted strategies across the whole of the FS. For example, in the year following the study, the 'soft start' was extended into the Nursery and then into Reception the year after. In addition, greater informality was introduced into the Learning Journey and the structure of the Open Morning was also extended into the FS. This could be seen as evidence of the theory's adequacy. Nonetheless, only a few of these strategies became embedded into practice beyond the specific plane. Perhaps more disappointingly, however, corresponding changes beyond the specific plane meant that many were not sustained within the Pre-Nursery beyond the next year. The following chapter will summarise the main findings of the inquiry before exploring the implications of its initial success but its failure to 'create and sustain effective systems' (Cole, 1996 p.350).

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Within this final chapter the aims of the inquiry and its theoretical underpinnings will be briefly summarised. The main findings will then be discussed. The implications of the findings for attempting partnership working within an intercultural context will be explored. Potential limitations of the research will also be outlined and possible avenues for further research will be put forth.

The aim of the inquiry

Underlying this enquiry was a desire to understand more about home-school interactions within the Pre-Nursery of an international school. Influenced by policy advocating parental partnerships (DfE, 2012; Tickell, 2011) and Jordan's distinction between scaffolding and co-construction (Jordan, 2004), it was surmised that differences may exist between interactions that scaffold parents into the school's view of learning and those that attempt to co-construct an understanding of the child as a learner. It was further postulated that, although beneficial, scaffolding could have limited effectiveness within an international school wherein diverse but equally valuable home learning practices may exist. Utilising these suppositions as a normative theory, guiding practice, (Hammersley, 2012) three research questions were devised:

- *How can a Pre-Nursery Teacher in a British International School develop a shared understanding with parents about their children's learning?*
- *To what extent can an international school develop a 'partnership working' approach with parents?*
- *What are the conditions that support or hinder the development of shared understanding between home and school within an international school?*

Exploring intercultural understanding within home-school communication in an international school

This study was prompted by a desire to understand ‘partnership working’ (DfE, 2012, p.3) within a diverse international school parental body. It was hypothesised that this necessitated the co-construction of meaning between home and school. Nonetheless, the manner in which this could be achieved was unclear, as little was understood about parental involvement within this context. Consequently, an explorative case study was instigated within which attempts were made to gain greater understanding.

The enquiry was intended to be a context dependent exemplar of ‘practical knowledge’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006) influenced by Cole’s view that a researcher should be a ‘participant and an analyst’ (1996, p.349) and use their systematic theoretical knowledge to ‘help things grow’ (p.349) in the context within which they are immersed. Consequently, the development of practical strategies was deemed the necessary starting point for the inquiry. The strategies chosen were influenced by EY policy (DfE, 2012) and literature (Tickell, 2011; Evangelou et al, 2009; Jordan, 2004; Carr, 2001; Whalley, 2007, amongst others) as well as concepts of dialogue (Bohm, 1996; Buber, 1947 and Bakhtin, 1981) and interculturalism (Tate, 2011; Poore, 2005; Davy, 2011; Joslin, 2002; Van Oord, 2005; Allan, 2003 and Heyward, 2002). Theoretical reflection suggested that encouraging parents to systematically share observational information about their child would enhance the potential for the co-construction of understanding about that child. Accordingly, a decision was made to involve parents within the redevelopment of the reporting and assessment tool called the Learning Journey and a series of parental meetings were instigated.

The parental meetings were illuminating and resulted in a crucial re-assessment of the role of scaffolding within home-school interactions. Prior to the parental meetings, it was feared that the process of scaffolding might alienate parents by assigning the teacher the role of ‘professional expert’ and sidelining parental knowledge as ‘other’ (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000, p.242). Analysis of the parental dialogue, however, indicated a closer integration between the concepts of scaffolding and co-construction than originally thought.

It became apparent that scaffolding parents into a clearer understanding of the Pre-Nursery pedagogy may prevent misunderstanding and initiate meaningful dialogue. Consequently, the study was expanded beyond the Learning Journey and a range of strategies aimed specifically at scaffolding parents into a stronger understanding of Pre-Nursery practice were instigated. This considerable change of stance was further supported by a clearly articulated parental desire to share in our professional knowledge and a greater understanding of parental need and confidence within this context.

Nonetheless, the parental meetings also indicated that, unless pedagogical information was presented within a meaningful context (Donaldson, 1978) its significance was likely to be lost (a point reiterated within Hughes and Greenhough, 2006). Consequently, whilst resisting attempts to individualise all communication, ways were sought to enhance the scaffolding potential of existing tools by making the information they contained more meaningful to parents. This did not necessitate any major changes. Instead, increased understanding of parental need led to the refining of existing tools and strategies, the appreciation of which had been indicated within the meetings. Consequently, changes were made within the Pre-Nursery newsletter, the class blog and the termly Open Mornings. Furthermore, greater co-operation was instigated between the Admission Department and the Pre-Nursery resulting in greater dissemination of Pre-Nursery values and practice to new and prospective parents. Nonetheless reflecting Jordan (2014), it was important that a range of other responses with greater dialogic potential, supplemented these strategies. Consequently, modifications were also made within the use of the Red Book, Pre-Nursery planning and in the format and distribution of the Learning Journey. In addition, opportunities for face-to-face interaction with parents were increased within the Open Morning and 'soft start'.

At the conclusion of the study, data analysis indicated that a shared understanding had been co-constructed between school and Parent Y about Child X. This suggested that integrating conceptions of scaffolding and co-construction enhanced the potential for meaningful dialogue. Reflecting Bohm (1996), Buber (1947), Bakhtin (1981) and Walker (2002), the presentation of a clearer image of our pedagogy may have prompted parents to consider how this related to their own educational values. Without this starting point, dialogue may have been inhibited simply by a lack of knowledge about our views. Furthermore, to produce a

clear image of our perspective, Pre-Nursery staff had to clarify and refine their own pedagogical priorities. Thus, rather than alienating parents as initially thought, scaffolding now appeared an integral part of understanding the self (Bohm, 1996; Walker, 2002) and turning ‘toward the other’ (Buber, 1947, p.7) seen as essential to the co-construction of meaning. However, scaffolding could remain ‘authoritative’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p.346) unless supported by a meaningful dialogue about the integration of home and school perspectives and a willingness for all participants to be flexible on peripheral issues. Thus, to succeed, scaffolding may be dependent upon co-construction and vice versa. Nonetheless, despite the seeming efficacy of integrating scaffolding and co-construction, the impossibility of isolating ‘necessary and jointly sufficient conditions’ (Hammersley, 2012, p.401) meant that no causal relationship between the strategies utilised and the subsequent interactions could be proven. Furthermore, as Parent Y appeared generally in alliance with Pre-Nursery pedagogy, the data offered little illumination on engaging with parents with profoundly differing views on education; an important motivation for the study. Nevertheless, a greater understanding of parental interactions within this context was gained, upon which a number of tentative pedagogical and theoretical conclusions were drawn.

Developing a theory for future practice

Reflecting on the study as a whole, utilising Jordan’s distinction between scaffolding and co-construction was beneficial and led to a deeper understanding of parental interaction. In turn, this led to a more consistent and focused use of home-school communication tools (seen as crucial by Harris and Goodall, 2008 and Hughes and Greenhough, 2006). In addition, although no definitive conclusions could be drawn, the findings suggested that integrating conceptions of scaffolding and co-construction within home-school communication enhanced the potential for partnership working. Furthermore, this postulate offered a potential model for future practice. Within this model differing tools and strategies could be used to present a clear ‘image’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p.361) of a practitioner’s pedagogy to parents. Simultaneously, negotiation on how this pedagogy and home learning practices meaningfully interconnect could be invited, either through differing use of the same tools or through the inclusion of tools with more dialogic potential.

Nonetheless, creating a clear distinction between scaffolding and co-construction was found to be misleading, as the study suggested a far greater interdependence between both concepts than originally thought. Consequently, rather than considering these concepts as distinct and in opposition to one another, it appeared more beneficial to view them as existing along a continuum. Seen in this way, whilst remaining interconnected, certain tools or strategies would emphasise one or other concept to differing degrees. For example, whilst the information sharing within our blog was aimed specifically at scaffolding parents into a meaningful image of our pedagogy, affordances for co-construction remained within the invitation to comment and suggestions for home learning.

Viewing the concepts of scaffolding and co-construction as interconnected along a continuum could enhance our understanding of partnership working by providing a framework for analysing effective practice. For example, within the successful 'Learning Together' project undertaken by the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) (Evangelou et al, 2007; PEEP, 2015) emphasis is placed on scaffolding parents into an understanding of child development. This is extended beyond the setting through the use of home learning packs which contain developmental information and suggestions for home learning activities. In turn, this explicit scaffolding offers affordances for co-construction through dialogue with parents about those home learning experiences. In a related PEEP project, practitioners use their expertise and the cultural knowledge of parents to co-construct learning scenarios focused on music (Young et al, 2007). Here, co-construction is foregrounded and all stakeholders have the potential to define quality learning (seen as crucial by Langston and Abbott, 2005; Moss et al, 2000) but the expertise of the practitioner remains an essential scaffold.

Within this study, different tools were used to foreground either scaffolding or co-construction. Nonetheless, many offered opportunities for both and the overall framework resulted in an integration of both concepts (as within PEEP). Even so, to move beyond a tokenistic dialogue, a deep understanding of the subtle distinctions between scaffolding and co-construction remained essential, alongside a genuine commitment to engage with parents. Jordan (2004) notes that movement between scaffolding and co-construction is possible, if practitioners have access to the full range of skills. Thus, partnership working within international education may depend upon the existence of knowledgeable and skilled

practitioners, as in the UK (Tickell, 2011). Nevertheless, the study indicated that the motives and competencies of the Pre-Nursery parental body differed from those found within much parental engagement literature (see Chapter One) with important implications for home-school interaction within this context.

Jordan (2004) notes that for co-construction to occur, all participants within a dialogue need to feel empowered. Thus, mutual trust is deemed necessary (Genat, 2009; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). For Hughes and Greenhough (2006), however, interactions between home and school can be fraught with issues of 'risk and threat' (p.485) related to underlying power relations. In much parental partnership literature (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000; Wheeler and Conner 2009; Hughes and Greenhough, 2006, amongst others) the practitioner is perceived as the more powerful participant. Within international education, however, this may not be so. As outlined above, a confident parental stance was displayed throughout the study. Furthermore, the expertise of the teacher was seen as situated and therefore limited. Like Hedegaard (2012), Hughes and Greenhough (2006) note that knowledge transfer between home and school is dependent upon active reinterpretation by differing participants, based upon their own distinct purposes and agendas. If parental motivations appear vastly different from that of the teacher, teachers may be reluctant to open up their practice to more visible scrutiny, as this may leave them feeling vulnerable. This is especially pertinent when one considers that international school teachers have no professional body to represent their rights and are often employed on one or two year rolling contracts wherein renewal is not guaranteed and could be influenced by powerful parental boards (a point noted by Hayden, 2006). Consequently, although empowering parents is the focus of much current literature (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000; Whalley, 2007, amongst others) the potential for an egalitarian home-school relationship within international education may instead be dependent upon empowering the teachers. The emphasis on empowering parents may be explained by an underlying aim to enhance the life chances of disadvantaged children. Investigating the empowerment of teachers within expensive international schools may seem to have little relevance to this debate. Nonetheless, teacher vulnerability within home-school interactions is not isolated to international education, as indicated by Hughes and Greenhough (2006). Hence unpicking the complex power relations at play within partnership working could be beneficial, whatever the context. Interestingly, though the parental confidence noted above was not universal.

As outlined in the findings, home-school interactions within the study appeared positive and healthy. Nonetheless, a comparison of the frequency and duration of communication with Parent Y and the remainder of the parental cohort (See Table 9 and 10) revealed a marked difference. In addition, the fear of being deemed ‘pushy’ or unwelcome, articulated within the initial parental meetings, indicated that not all parents felt confident to express their views. A lack of self-assurance within home-school interactions is often attributed to levels of parental education (Wheeler and Connor, 2009; Melhuish et al, 2008; Harris and Goodall 2008). Nonetheless, international school parents are predominantly well educated (Hayden, 2006). Furthermore, this fear was most clearly articulated by parents who were also teachers within the school, and were thus similarly educated. This could indicate a fairly negative attitude towards parental interaction by teachers (perhaps due to the vulnerability outlined above) but may simply be evidence of the complex relationship and duality of roles experienced by teacher/parents to their fellow work colleagues (Zilber, 2009). Relatively high numbers of teaching colleagues within the parental cohort is commonplace within international education (Zilber, 2010, personal communication) but less common within UK institutions. Thus, adding a further complication within the already complex scenario of home-school relations within this context. Add to this the relatively high staff over (Hayden, 2006) and thus lack of continuity found within international institutions, then it can be understood that gaining a deeper understanding of the potentially contradictory motives of teaching parents and the competency of participants to act on those motives (including their power to be able to do so) may be incredibly complex, but also necessary for successful home-school interactions within international education.

The need to understand and respond to the particular needs of the parental cohort is reflected in the conclusions of UK based researchers (Harris and Goodall, 2008; Hughes and Greenhough, 2006 and Goodall et al, 2011, for example) and within the demand to respond to multiplicity and difference seen in EY literature (Langston and Abbott, 2005; Moss et al, 2000, amongst others). This inquiry confirms the necessity of developing a deeper understanding of the parental cohort within international education but also suggests that developing a deeper understanding of the particular needs of the teaching body may also be beneficial. Consequently, differing solutions to those of UK settings may be required.

Furthermore, the diversity found within international schools themselves (Hayden, 2006) mean that an array of differing solutions may be required; a daunting prospect. Nonetheless, Hedegaard's concept of motives and competencies (2012, p.130) may provide us with a suitable framework to explore the needs of all participants - parents, teachers and school. Within this study the parental meetings prompted an examination of our existing home-school strategies (our competencies) whilst understanding our motives enabled us to create a clear image of our philosophy. This examination enabled us to maximise the affordances for both scaffolding and co-construction within our current competencies. Furthermore, it enabled the identification of those principles that were fundamental and those that were negotiable (seen as crucial by Walker, 2012). Thus, for international school practitioners hoping to enhance home-school interactions, a beneficial first step may be a thorough examination of their motives and current competencies, including their understanding of the concepts of scaffolding and co-construction.

Nonetheless, these concepts may need further examination both theoretical and empirical before a consistent pedagogical approach could be clearly outlined. Furthermore, to ensure sustainable success, the interrelationship between interactions within the specific plane (Hedegaard 2012) and other planes may need to be fully explored and understood. The focus of this inquiry was the potential for enhancing partnership working within the 'specific plane' of interactions within the classroom. Nonetheless, throughout the study the limitations of this approach and the necessity of understanding the interrelationship between the class, school and the wider educational community was constantly reiterated.

Within Chapter One it was hypothesised that in order to move beyond a fleeting and momentary co-construction of understanding within the specific plane of interaction, the potential for the co-construction of meaning had to become embedded within home-school communication tools and artefacts. Furthermore, these tools and artefacts would need to affect corresponding change beyond the specific plane. This aspect of the inquiry will now be considered.

Extending change beyond the classroom

As noted above, this enquiry was intended to be a context dependent exemplar of ‘practical knowledge’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006) influenced by Cole’s view that a researcher should use their theoretical knowledge to ‘help things grow’ (p.349) in the context within which they are immersed. Powell (2000) and Guskey (2000) argue that job embedded reflection is the form of professional development most likely to enhance teaching and learning through successful practice change. However, this may depend upon a corresponding change at the level of the organisation itself (Guskey, 2000). Although, the focus of this inquiry was interactions within the specific plane of the classroom, it was hoped that successful adaptations within any tools and artefacts would promote corresponding change beyond the Pre-Nursery. In some instances this was indeed the case. However, despite their seeming efficacy, many of the practice adaptations initiated within the inquiry were very short-lived even within the Pre-Nursery. In order to explain their brevity, it was necessary to consider the interrelationship of interactions between classroom, school and the wider educational community.

For Cole, (1996), a theory’s adequacy is assessed through its ability to ‘create and *sustain* effective systems’ (p.350, emphasis added). This suggests that if a system is not sustained then the underlying theory could be at fault. Engestrom (2001) however, notes that tools and artefacts are subject to tensions and conflict that may affect their proliferation. Being both material and ideal (Cole, 1996), tools and artefacts (which include rules and traditions, Engestrom 2001) act to recreate and promulgate norms and values and thus will reflect the differing motives and competencies of participants (Hedegaard, 2012). Consequently, sustainability may have little to do with the efficacy of a tool (or underlying theory) and more to do with any tension between the motives and competencies (including power relations) embedded within them. During the year of the study and directly after, many changes took place within the school that appeared to be in tension with the adapted tools and influenced their proliferation. It is recognised that within the following discussion, the links between the changes outlined and the fate of the adapted tools is merely conjecture. However the experience illustrated the limitations of a practitioner’s ability to enhance interpersonal interactions within the context of the classroom and highlighted the necessity of a deeper understanding the interrelationship between the classroom, school and beyond. For Hedegaard these would be the ‘formal societal plane’, ‘general institutional plane’ and

‘specific plane’ of interactions (2012, pp 129-130). Further investigation may be necessary to decide if Hedegaard’s framework is the most appropriate to analyse these relations. However, they provide the organisational frame underlying this brief reflection.

Throughout the study year, the positivity within home-school interactions in the Pre-Nursery was noticed by other FS staff and led to the expansion of some strategies beyond the specific plane and additional adaptations to other tools. For example, in the year following the study, the ‘soft start’ was extended into the Nursery and then into Reception the year after. In addition, the scrapbook format was adopted for the Learning Journey and regular ‘focus child’ meetings with parents were initiated, increasing the potential for the co-construction of meaning through more frequent face-to-face interaction. Adaptations to the Open Morning were extended across the FS and the close co-operation between Pre-Nursery and the Admission Department was retained. At the time of writing these strategies remain. Nonetheless, not all the adaptations had such a rosy future.

During the time that the inquiry was taking place, the school was also undergoing a ten-year accreditation review by The Council of International Schools (CIS). Reflecting ‘recognised external quality standards’ (Siraj- Blatchford and Wong, 1999, p.14), accreditation by such governing bodies as CIS is seen as crucial within the ‘competitive marketplace’ (MacDonald, 2006 p.192) of international schooling and are taken very seriously. The ten-year review consisted of a self-study report and a review inspection. The inspection praised the school for its intercultural practice, its parental involvement and the practice within the FS. However, it also noted the necessity of establishing a system whereby every child’s progress throughout the school could be ‘tracked’. Although, systems of following and assessing pupil progress were already in place, they were found inadequate and thus it was recommended that they be replaced. Consequently, in the year following the study there was a renewed focus on data driven assessment and a system of tracking individual pupil progress was introduced. This had a profound effect on many of the adapted tools, especially those developed to be more responsive to observations of home learning.

To assist in tracking and monitoring children's progress, assessment within the Pre-Nursery was immediately changed by the Primary Leadership Team and FS staff were required to use the developmental statements within the non-statutory guidance 'Development Matters' (The British Association for Early Childhood Education, 2012) as a checklist (See Figure 12) to assess and record children progress. Once a term this information was transferred onto a summary sheet of age related expectations and uploaded into a computer data base.



A Unique Child: observing what a child is learning	
 30-50 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves freely and with pleasure and confidence in a range of ways, such as slithering, shuffling, rolling, crawling, walking, running, jumping, skipping, sliding and hopping. • Mounts stairs, steps or climbing equipment using alternate feet. • Walks downstairs, two feet to each step while carrying a small object. • Runs skilfully and negotiates space successfully, adjusting speed or direction to avoid obstacles. • Can stand momentarily on one foot when shown. • Can catch a large ball. • Draws lines and circles using gross motor movements. • Uses one-handed tools and equipment, e.g. makes snips in paper with child scissors. • Holds pencil between thumb and two fingers, no longer using whole-hand grasp. • Holds pencil near point between first two fingers and thumb and uses it with good control. • Can copy some letters, e.g. letters from their name.
 40-60+ months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiments with different ways of moving. • Jumps off an object and lands appropriately. • Negotiates space successfully when playing racing and chasing games with other children, adjusting speed or changing direction to avoid obstacles. • Travels with confidence and skill around, under, over and through balancing and climbing equipment. • Shows increasing control over an object in pushing, patting, throwing, catching or kicking it. • Uses simple tools to effect changes to materials. • Handles tools, objects, construction and malleable materials safely and with increasing control. • Shows a preference for a dominant hand. • Begins to use anticlockwise movement and retrace vertical lines. • Begins to form recognisable letters. • Uses a pencil and holds it effectively to form recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed. <p>Early Learning Goal Children show good control and co-ordination in large and small movements. They move confidently in a range of ways, safely negotiating space. They handle equipment and tools effectively, including pencils for writing.</p>

Figure 12: Excerpt from Physical Development: moving and handling (p.24)

At the bottom of each page within Development Matters it clearly states,

Children develop at their own rates, and in their own ways. The development statements and their order should not be taken as necessary steps for individual children. They should not be used as checklists. The age/stage bands overlap because these are not fixed age boundaries but suggest a typical range of development.

Within England, the Foundation Stage Profile (DfE, 2014) summarises children's development at the end of the EYFS and EY practitioners are encouraged to use ongoing assessment and observational information from practitioners and parents in its completion. Nonetheless, the CIS request necessitated the establishment of an easily comparable form of data that could be utilised from the youngest student (potentially eighteen months) to the eldest. The need for a rapid response to the CIS report resulted in the particular re-interpretation of the text (Ball, 1993) outlined above. The original inspiration for changing our planning and assessment was a desire to become more responsive to the unique needs of the children within our particular context and to embed a wide range of observational information within our planning and assessment. Thus it was disappointing to return to an assessment format that had been discarded as limiting this potential. However, Pre-Nursery staff were obliged to prioritise this new assessment format and although this did not require the removal of our revised planning format, the qualitative information it contained was difficult to translate into easily comparable data. This resulted in our revised format being used less frequently. In turn, this meant that it contained less useful information, became a less useful tool and was thus used even less.

The planning was not the only tool that was affected. The heightened emphasis on tracking children's progress also led to the re-organisation of the Red Books. The desire to monitor and assess children's reading at home led to the introduction of a more formal organisation, wherein each page was organised into sections with boxes for specific content. Although, neither of these changes were designed to inhibit parental interaction, they offered less affordance for practitioners to respond to the needs of parents through increased standardisation. The Red Book had been seen by parents as the most individualised and responsive home-school communication tool and its centrality to this study is seen within the parental meetings and within the relationship with Parent Y. Thus the changes to the Red Book in particular were very disappointing.

Our failure to maintain our planning and assessment formats reflected the conclusion of Davy (2011) who notes that unless integral to assessment, aspirations to respond to cultural diversity may easily become sidelined by busy teachers. Although the insistence on tracking children did not in itself cause us to abandon our new planning formats, the necessity of

collecting a vast array of easily comparable data (that could then be formatted for statistical analysis) meant that as teachers we had less time to devote to collecting and sharing more qualitative data. Within Chapter One it was argued that maintaining the process of sustained shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008) whilst simultaneously working towards 'learning and development requirements' (DfE 2012, p.3) that all children must acquire is a fine balancing act that requires knowledgeable, motivated and skillful practitioners, fully conversant with the distinction between scaffolding and co-construction. Nonetheless, although we were motivated and were becoming more skilful in responding to our children and parents, changes beyond the Pre-Nursery tipped the precarious balance we had achieved.

The changes previously undertaken within the Pre-Nursery had been an attempt to move away from a standardisation of interaction to a more responsive one. However, the original adaptations, appeared to be in tension or 'conflict' (Engestrom, 2001) with those subsequently required by the institutional plane. In terms of Hedegaard's (2012) framework, the tension between our motives and the motives of the governing body CIS, may have created tools and artefacts that offered less affordance for our motives. This indicated that using Hedegaard's (2012) framework may provide a useful analytical tool for exploring the relationship between the multiple influences affecting partnership working. However, it was beyond the scope of this inquiry to undertake a detailed analysis of the interrelationship between different planes of interaction. Consequently, the study was only able to partially illuminate interactions within the specific plane, as the influence of the other planes was ever-present. Interestingly, Hughes and Greenhough (2006) advocate for practitioner ownership in the development of home-school communication tools. This study indicates that this could lead to disappointment and frustration, if the results are not in alliance with the motives of participants within other planes. Perhaps then, the most profitable use of practitioner experience may lie in the development of a consistent whole school approach (Goodall et al, 2011), through the development of a more responsive home-school policy. However, reconciling the 'dichotomous positions' (Langston and Abbott, 2005, p. 68) of easily comparable universal standards and responding to multiplicity may remain problematic.

Conclusion

To investigate ‘partnership working’ (DfE, 2012, p.3) with the diverse parental body of a British International School Pre-Nursery an explorative case study was instigated. Within this study, a range of strategies were used to explore the potential for the co-construction of meaning between home and school. At the completion of the study, evidence indicated that the development of a shared understanding about Child X had been achieved. Although the nature of the study meant that no definitive conclusions regarding causality could be drawn, the evidence suggested that partnership working might be enhanced when conceptions of scaffolding and co-construction were purposefully integrated within home-school strategies, rather than separated as originally hypothesised. Nonetheless, effective integration may remain dependent upon a thorough appreciation of the subtle distinctions and interconnections between both concepts. Such an appreciation could also enhance the analytical framework through which practitioners evaluate effective home-school interactions (as exemplified within the Penn Green Centre [Whalley, 2007] and PEEP [Evangelou et al, 2007; Young et al, 2007]). Nevertheless, understanding the particular motives and competencies (Hedegaard, 2012, p.130) of participants within an international context could remain crucial for the development of the whole school consistency seen as essential by Goodall et al (2011) and Van Oord (2005). Furthermore, additional knowledge of the interrelation between differing planes of interaction (Hedegaard, 2012) and the power relations therein may be necessary to ensure the sustainability of successful home-school communications.

Whilst further investigation may still be required to deepen our understanding of home-school interactions in an international setting, this research indicates that enhancing partnership working with parents is possible, even within the limitations of the specific plane of interaction (Hedegaard, 2012). Within any setting, the dialogic potential of existing tools and strategies may not be fully utilised. Engaging parents in a collaborative exploration of the potential of these tools could be incredibly beneficial (a point supported by Whalley, 2007; Young et al, 2007), even for individual practitioners. The scale and nature of this may differ tremendously within each setting according to the needs and expectations of both the school and parents. However, this research indicates that even a tiny change (for example an

attitudinal change towards the use of the Red Book) can have a substantial and positive impact on parental involvement. Although, in this particular case, changes in the general institutional plane adversely affected a number of the adapted strategies, the lessons learnt through their undertaking were incredibly positive and they continue to shape my practice and, in my view, enhance my relationship with parents.

References

- Abercrombie, N.; Hill, S. and Turner, B., 2006. *The Penguin dictionary of sociology*. London: Penguin Books.
- Allen, M., 2002. Cultural borderlands: a case of cultural dissonance in an international school. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 1(1), pp.83-110.
- Andersen, P. H. and Kragh, H., 2010. Sense and sensibility: two approaches for using existing theory in theory-building qualitative research. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39, pp.49–55.
- Anning, A.; Cullen, J. and Fleer, M., Eds, 2004. *Early childhood education: society and culture*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bailey, M.T., 1992. Do physicists use case studies? Thoughts on public administration research. *Public Administration Review*, 52(1), pp.47- 54.
- Bakhtin, M.M., 1981. *The dialogic imagination; four essays* Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Ball, S. J., 1993. What is policy? Texts, trajectories and toolboxes. *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, 13(2), pp.10-17.
- Ball, S. J., 1995. Intellectuals or technicians? The urgent role of theory in Educational Studies. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 43(3), pp.255-271.
- Ball, S. J., 2010. New class inequalities in education. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 30(3/4), pp.155-166.
- Bohm, D., 1996. *On dialogue*. London: Routledge.
- Bradbury, A., 2013. Education policy and the ‘ideal learner’: producing recognisable learner-subjects through early years assessment. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34(1), pp.1-19.
- Bradley, G., 2010. *The ‘maid phenomenon’: home/school differences in pedagogy and their implications for children in two international schools in the Middle East*. Thesis (EdD). University of Bath, UK.

British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2011. *Ethical guidelines for educational research*. Available from <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines/> [Accessed on 26th January 2013].

Bronson, P. and Merryman, A., 2009. *Nurtureshock: new thinking about children*. New York: Hatchette Book Group.

Buber, M., 1947. *Between man and man*. London: Routledge.

Cancemi, J., 2009. *The meaning of assessment with and through young children: A socio - cultural perspective*. Thesis (EdD). University of Bath, UK.

Carr, M., 2001. *Assessment in early childhood settings: Learning Stories*. London: Sage Publications.

Carr, W., 2006. Education without theory. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(2), pp. 136 - 159.

Chaiklin, S., 2003. The Zone of Proximal Development in Vygotsky's analysis of learning and instruction. In A. Kozulin; B. Gindis; V. Ageyev and S. Miller, eds, *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cole, M., 1996. *Cultural psychology: a once and future discipline*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap/Harvard University Press.

Cousin, G., 2005. Case study research. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 29(3), pp.421-427.

Daniels, H., 2001. *Vygotsky and pedagogy* Routledge: London UK: Falmer.

David, T., Goouch, K., Powell, S. and Abbott, L., 2003. *Birth to three matters: a review of the literature*. DCSF Research Report Number 444: London: DCSF.

Davy, I., 2011. Learners without borders: a curriculum for global citizenship. *IBO position paper*, Cardiff: International Baccalaureate Organisation.

Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008. *Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage: setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five*. London: DCSF.

Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008a. *Every child a talker: guidance for early language lead practitioners*. London: DCSF.

Department for Education, 2012. *Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*. UK: DfE.

Department for Education, 2013. *The national curriculum in England Key stages 1 and 2 framework document*. UK: DfE.

Department for Education, 2014. *Early years foundation stage profile: handbook*. UK: DfE.

Department for Education and Employment /QCA, 2000. *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage*. London: QCA.

Department for Education and Skills /Sure Start, 2002. *Birth to three matters—a framework to support children in their earliest years*. London: DfES.

Desforges, C. with Abouchaar, A., 2003. *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a literature review*. UK: DfES.

Donaldson, M., 1978. *Children's minds*. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins.

Early Learning Partnership Parental Engagement Group, 2010. *Principles for engaging with families; a framework for local authorities and national organisations to evaluate and improve engagement with families*. UK: NCB.

Engestrom, Y., 2001. Expansive learning at work; toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), pp.133- 156.

Evangelou, M.; Brooks, G. and Smith, S., 2007. The birth to school study: evidence on the effectiveness of PEEP, an early intervention for children at risk of educational under-achievement. *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(5), pp.581-609.

Evangelou, M.; Sylva K.; Kyriacou, M.; Wild, M. and Glenny, G., 2009. Early years learning and development literature review. London: DCSF (Research Report DCSF-RR176).

Fennes, H. and Hapgood, K., 1997. *Intercultural learning in the classroom*. London: Cassell.

- Flyvbjerg, B., 2006. Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), pp.219-245.
- Genat, B., 2009. Building emergent situated knowledges in participatory action research. *Action Research*, 7(1), pp.101–115.
- Goodall, J.; Vorhaus, J.; Carpentieri, J.; Brooks, G.; Akerman, A and Harris, A., 2011. *Review of best practice in parental engagement*. UK: DFE (Research Report -RR156).
- Guernsey, L., 2007. *Into the minds of babes: how screen time affects children from birth to age five*. Philadelphia: Basic Books.
- Guskey, T. R., 2000. *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.
- Hammersley, M., 2012. Troubling theory in case study research. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 31(3), pp.393-405.
- Harding, C. and Measures, N., eds., 2007. *Fifty years of Bangkok Patana School: The British International School in Thailand*. Thailand: Bangkok Patana School
- Harris, A. and Goodall, J., 2008. Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. *Educational Research*, 50(3), pp.277-289.
- Hayden, M., 2006. *Introduction to international education*. London: Sage.
- Hayden, M. and Thompson, J., eds., 1998. *International education: principles and practice*. London: Kogan-Page.
- Hayden, M. and Thompson, J., eds., 2000. *International schools and international education: improving teaching management and quality*. London: Kogan-Page.
- Hedegaard, M., 2012. Analysing children's learning and development in everyday settings from a cultural-historical wholeness approach. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 19(2), pp.127-138.
- Heyward, M., 2002. From international to intercultural: redefining the international school for a globalized world. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 1, pp.9-32.

Hill, M., 2006. Children's voices on ways of having a voice: children's and young people's perspectives on methods used in research and consultation. *Childhood*, 13(1), pp.69-89.

Hillebrand, B.; Kok, R. and Biemans, W., 2001. A comment on Johnston, Leach, and Liu. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 30, pp.651–657.

Hofstede, G., 1991. *Cultures and organisations: software of the mind*. London McGraw–Hill.

Hughes, M. and Greenhough, P., 2006. Boxes, bags and videotape: enhancing home–school communication through knowledge exchange activities. *Educational Review*, 58(4), pp.471-487.

Hughes, P. and MacNaughton, G., 2000. Consensus, dissensus or community: the politics of parent involvement in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 1(3), pp.241- 258.

International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2013. *The IB Learner Profile*. Cardiff: International Baccalaureate Organisation.

International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2013. *The International Baccalaureate Diploma*. Cardiff: International Baccalaureate Organisation.

Jordan, B., 2004. *Scaffolding learning and co-constructing understandings*. In A. Anning, J. Cullen, and M. Flear, eds., 2004. *Early childhood education: society and culture*. London: Sage Publications.

Joslin, P., 2002. Teacher relocation: reflections in the context of international schools. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 1(1), pp.33-62.

Katz, I. and Valentine, K., 2009. *Lessons for Australia from the UK Sure Start Programme*. Australia: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, (SPRC Report 2/09).

Katz, L.G., 1977. *Talks with teachers*. Washington DC: National Association For the Education of Young Children.

Kozulin, A., 1998. *Psychological tools: a sociocultural approach to education*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

- Laevers, F., ed., in collaboration with: Daems, M.; De Bruyckere, G.; Declercq, B.; Moons, K.; Silkens, K.; Snoeck, G. and Van Kessel, M., 2005. *Well-being and involvement in care settings. A process-oriented self-evaluation instrument*. Research Centre for Experiential Education: Leuven University.
- Langston, A. and Abbott, L., 2005. Quality matters. In L. Abbott, and A. Langston, eds., 2005. *Birth to three matters: supporting the framework of effective practice*. Maidenhead UK: Open University Press.
- Lutz, H., 2002. At Your Service Madam! The Globalization of Domestic Service. *Feminist Review*, 70 (Globalization), pp.89-104.
- MacDonald, J., 2006. The international school industry: examining international schools through an economic lens. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(2), pp.191-213.
- Mackenzie, P.; Hayden, M. and Thompson, J., 2001. The third constituency: parents in international schools. *International Schools Journal*, 20 (2), pp.57-64.
- Marsico, G.; Komatsu, K. and Iannaccone, A., 2013. Crossing boundaries: intercontextual dynamics between family and school. Charlotte, N.C: Information Age.
- Melhuish, E. C.; Mai B.; Phan, M. P.; Sylva, K.; Sammons, P.; Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B., 2008. Effects of the home learning environment and preschool center experience upon literacy and numeracy development in Early Primary School. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64 (1), pp.95-114.
- Moll, L.C., 1990. Introduction. In L.C. Moll, ed., *Vygotsky and education. Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Morrow, V., 2001. Using qualitative methods to elicit young people's perspectives on the environments: some ideas for community health initiatives. *Health Education Research*, 16 (3), pp.255-268.
- Morrow, V. and Richards, M., 1996. The ethics of social research with children: an overview. *Children and Society*, 10 (2), pp.90-105.

Moss, P., 2007. Meetings across the paradigmatic divide. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 39 (3), pp.229- 245.

Moss, P.; Dahlberg, G. and Pence, A., 2000. Getting beyond the problem with quality. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 8 (2), pp.103-115.

Moylett, H. and Djemli, P., 2005. Practitioners matter. In L. Abbott, and A. Langston, eds., *Birth to three matters: supporting the framework of effective practice*. Maidenhead UK: Open University Press.

Myers David, G., 1975. Discussion induced attitude polarisation. *Human Relations* 28(8), pp.699 – 714.

National Quality Improvement Network, 2010. *Principles for engaging with families: A framework for local authorities and national organisations to evaluate and improve engagement with families*. London: NCB.

Neuman, W. L., 2003. *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches (5th edition)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

O’Gorman, L. and Ailwood, J., 2012. ‘They get fed up with playing’: parents’ views on play-based learning in the Preparatory Year. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood [Online]* 13 (4), pp.266–275 Available from http://www.worlds.co.uk/pdf/validate.asp?j=ciec&vol=13&issue=4&year=2012&article=2_OGorman_CIEC_13_4_web [Accessed July 10th 2014].

O’Hara, M.; Carter, C.; Dewis, P.; Kay, J. and Wainwright, J., 2011. *Successful dissertations: the complete guide for education, childhood and early childhood studies students*. London: Continuum Publishing.

PEAL (Parents, Early Years and Learning) <http://www.peal.org.uk/> [Accessed July 8th 2014].

PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership) <http://www.peeple.org.uk/> [Accessed April 18th 2015]

Poore, P., 2005. *Culture: the space between the bars, the silence between the notes*. AAIE Distinguished Overseas Lecture.

Popkewitz, T. S., 1998. Dewey, Vygotsky, and the social administration of the individual: constructivist pedagogy as systems of ideas in historical spaces. *American Educational Research Journal*, 35(4), pp.535-570.

Powell, W., 2000. Professional development and reflective practice. In Hayden, M. and Thompson, J., eds., *International schools and international education: improving teaching management and quality*. London: Kogan-Page.

Pugh, G., 1992. A policy for Early Childhood Services? In G. Pugh, ed., *Contemporary issues in the Early Years: working collaboratively for children*. London: Paul Chapman Publishers/National Children's Bureau.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999. *Early Learning Goals*. London: QCA.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2008. *Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Handbook* London: QCA.

Randles, C., 2012. Phenomenology: a review of the literature. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* 30 (11) originally published online 15 February DOI: 10.1177/8755123312436988 [Accessed 14th April 2014]

Rubin, H. J. and Rubin, I. S., 2005. *Qualitative interviewing: the art of hearing data* (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Schön, D. A., 1983. *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 1996. *Desirable learning outcomes*. London: SCAA.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Wong, Y., 1999. Defining and evaluating 'quality' Early Childhood Education in an international context: dilemmas and possibilities'. *Early Years*, 20(1), pp.7-18.

- Siraj-Blatchford, I.; Taggart, B.; Sylva, K.; Sammons, P. and Melhuish, E., 2008. Towards the transformation of practice in early childhood education: the effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 38, pp.23-36.
- Skidmore, D., 2006. Pedagogy and dialogue. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36(4), pp.503-514.
- Sylva, K.; Melhuish, E.C.; Sammons, P.; Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B., 2004a. *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the Early Primary Years*. London: DfES/ Institute of Education, University of London.
- Sylva, K.; Melhuish, E.C.; Sammons, P.; Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B., 2004b. *The effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project: Final report*. London: DfES/ Institute of Education, University of London.
- Sylva, K. and Pugh, G., 2005. Transforming the early years in England. *Oxford Review of Education*, 31(1), pp.11–27.
- Tate, N., 2011. Intercultural understanding. In G. Walker, ed., 2011. *The changing face of International Education: challenges for the IB*. Cardiff: International Baccalaureate Organisation.
- The British Association for Early Childhood Education, 2012. *Development matters*. London: Early Education.
- Thomas, N. and O’Kane, C., 1998. The ethics of participatory research with children. *Children and Society*, 12(5), pp.336-348.
- Thompson, J., 1998. Towards a model for international education. In M. Hayden, and J. Thompson, J., eds. *International education: principles and practice*. London: Kogan-Page.
- Tickell, C., 2011. *The Early Years: foundations for life, health and learning; an independent report on the Early Years Foundation Stage to Her Majesty’s Government*. London; Crown copyright (D16 (8857)/0311).
- Van Oord, L., 2005. Culture as a configuration of learning; hypotheses in the context of international education. *Journal of Research in International Education* 4(2), pp.173-191.
- Vygotsky, L., 1962. *Thought and language*. Cambridge, USA: The MIT Press.

- Walker, G., 2002. *To educate the nations: reflections on an international education*. UK: John Catt Educational Ltd.
- Walker, G., ed., 2011. *The changing face of international education: challenges for the IB*. Cardiff: International Baccalaureate Organisation.
- Walliman, N. and Buckler, S., 2008. *Your dissertation in education*. London: Sage Publications.
- Wells, G., 1986. *The meaning makers; children learning language and using language to learn*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Wertsch, J., 1985. *Vygotsky and the social formation of mind*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Whalley, M., 2007. *Involving parents in their children's learning*. (2nd edition), London: Sage Publications.
- Wheeler, H.; Connor, J. and Goodwin, H., 2006. *Parents, early years and learning*. London: NCB.
- Yamazumi, K., 2006. The active role of misreading and deviation in the formation of character. *CHAT Technical Reports* 1, pp.99-106.
- Yin, R., 1994. *Applications of case study research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Young, S.; Street, A. and Davies, E., 2007. The Music One-to-One project: developing approaches to music with parents and under-two-year-olds. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15(2), pp.253-267.
- Zilber, E., 2009. *Third culture kids - the children of educators in international schools*. UK: John Catt Educational.

Appendix 1

September 15th 2011

Dear Parents

As some of you may be aware, I am currently undertaking doctoral studies with the University of Bath, UK. I am at the stage of the research inquiry for my thesis, and have an interest in examining how we can improve our knowledge of children's learning at home through the use of our Learning Journey.

Last year within the Foundation Stage we began using the Learning Journey document as a way to share with you your child's learning at school. We hope that these documents are helpful and informative. However, we understand that children do not only learn at school but also through their experiences at home. I would like to use my Doctoral Research as an opportunity to enquire into a parental perspective on how we can improve our Learning Journey and include reflections on a child's learning at home as well as school.

My study would include various forms of data collection, but as a small scale study would not involve large numbers of participants. As such I am looking for volunteers who would be willing to share their views with me within a small group discussion. This discussion should last an hour at the most and, if the times and dates outlined below are not suitable, can be arranged at a mutually convenient time.

At all times during the study, I will be working within the guidelines for ethics and confidentiality of the University of Bath and, although the information collected will also be fed back to members of the Primary Leadership Team, all contributions will remain anonymous, for example cited as participant 1. The discussion may be recorded in order to ensure accurate recollection, but any recordings will be kept in a password protected folder and will be accessed only by me. If you would prefer to discuss your views with me privately then a personal interview can also be arranged. The assistance of a Thai translator can also be requested if you wish.

I feel that this is a very exciting study, and I hope that the outcome will improve our understanding of your child's learning both at school and at home. I would be very happy to disclose the result of my finished study to any interested parties. I hope that you feel able to contribute to this study and I look forward to hearing from you.

If you require any more information prior to making any decision please do not hesitate to contact me at mibi@...ac.th.

Thank you for your attention,

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Brinn

Permission Slip: Parent One

If you wish to participate in the study and are willing to attend a small group discussion with other interested parents, please complete the slip below and return it to Michelle Brinn c/o the Pre-Nursery.

If more than one parent is willing to participate please ensure that both sections of the form are completed and signed.

I _____ (Name) mother / father/ guardian of
_____ (child's name and class),

would be willing to participate in this study and attend a:

Small group discussion

Personal interview (Please delete as appropriate)

I understand and agree that any information collected may be used as part of the Doctoral Thesis of Michelle Brinn and within _____, albeit anonymously.

Signature:

E mail address :

Please indicate your preferred group meeting date and time. If none are suitable then please contact me on mibi@... to arrange a suitable time. Please also use this e mail if you wish to arrange a private interview.

I would like to attend: Please indicate a preference and I will e mail to confirm the date and time.

Meeting Choice:	Date	Time	Preference
One	Tuesday September 27th	7.15 am	
Two	Tuesday September 27th	11 am	
Three	Wednesday September 28th	4.30 pm	
Four	Thursday September 29th	7.15 am	
Five	Thursday September 29th	11am	

I request that a translator be present at the meeting. Yes / No (Delete as appropriate)

Appendix 2

Parental Interviews Guiding questions

Attitudes to learning		
How do you think young children learn best?	How can teachers' best support young children's learning?	How can parents' best support their children's learning? At home? In school?
Do parents and teachers support children's learning in different ways?	What and how do children learn when they are at school? Is this different from what and how they learn at home?	What do you think young children should be learning in school?
What do you think about the statement that young children learn just as much at home as they do at school?	Should children learn different things at home and in school?	Can children learn without adult support and intervention?
Where do you think that children learn the most – at home or in school?	Some people think that children learn best when school and home work closely together – do you agree? Why?	Were you surprised when you first came to BPS about any of the ways the young children are taught?
What do you think is meant by home-school collaboration?	Do you think that if teachers knew more about the types of things children did at home it may help their learning at school?	
Questions for Parents with experience of the Learning Journeys.		
When the Learning Journey first came home, what was your initial reaction? What do you think the purpose of the Learning Journey was?	Was the Learning Journey what you expected for your child's first assessment and reporting tool?	Did they tell you what you wanted to know?

When you first read them – did you want to be able to comment or contribute?	Did you understand how to contribute? Could this be improved?	Did you understand the relevance of the information they contained?
Did you understand that you were also able to contribute to the Learning Journey?	Did you feel you were able to contribute effectively to the Learning Journey?	Do you feel that the Pre-Nursery Team respected and responded to your contributions? How could this be improved?
Did the Learning Journey help you to build a relationship with the teaching team in the Pre-Nursery?	Do you feel encouraged to comment about your child's learning at home?	Did you feel worried about whether or not any contributions were appropriate or relevant?
How do feel about being able to contribute in your home language?		
Questions for parents without experience of the Learning Journeys		
What would you be expecting from your child's first reporting and assessment tool?	Would it be beneficial if you could also contribute your knowledge of your child's learning to any reporting tool?	
In your view, what sort of information should a reporting document contain?		

Appendix 3

Excerpt from Research Journal dated September 15th 2011.

Preconceptions to Parental Interviews.

What are my hypothesis/expectations, what am I expecting? It is perhaps important to analyse these prior to the interviews to ensure that I do not fully shape and frame the discussions beforehand.

I am expecting that there will be differences in the parents' perception of the role of the school in learning.

I am expecting that in many cases the parental expectation will be that we should be emphasising the more formal skills of learning, such as phonics, number knowledge etc.

I am expecting that they will be less familiar with the more dispositional focus on learning emphasised by Carr, Katz, IB learner profile etc.

I am expecting that they may possibly undervalue their own role in learning, or even feel that as they are paying so much for the school, that it should be more our responsibility.

I am expecting that they may accept the dispositional focus at Pre-Nursery level but will expect more knowledge focus later on.

I am expecting that the structure of the Learning Journey inhibits contribution in any other way than a narrow manner.

I am half expecting that there may even be national/cultural differences in attitudes, but so far this has not been shown clearly in either contributions to the Learning Journey or in other interactions with parents.

Appendix 4

Attitudes to learning; Parental Questionnaire

ทัศนคติต่อการเรียนรู้ ; แบบสอบถามสำหรับผู้ปกครอง

1. How do you think young children learn best?

1. ท่านคิดว่าเด็กเล็กเรียนรู้ด้วยวิธีการใดดีที่สุด

Imitating, exploring and doing!

2. What is the best way that a teacher can support a young child's learning?

2. วิธีการใดเป็นวิธีการที่ดีที่สุดที่คุณครูสามารถให้การสนับสนุนการเรียนรู้ของเด็กเล็ก

Giving a rich and varied experience of all sorts of things!

3. What is the best way that a parent can support their child's learning at home?

3. วิธีการใดเป็นวิธีการที่ดีที่สุดที่ผู้ปกครองสามารถให้การสนับสนุนการเรียนรู้ของบุตรหลานได้ที่ บ้าน

Being patient and following their interests, reading with them, questioning and letting them join in with things.

4. What is the best way that a parent can support their child's learning in school?

5. วิธีการใดเป็นวิธีการที่ดีที่สุดที่ผู้ปกครองสามารถให้การสนับสนุนการเรียนรู้ของบุตรหลานได้ที่ โรงเรียน

Talk to them about what they have been doing – pay attention to what is going on in school so you can help them if they come up with ideas on a theme. For example ...was very interested in Birthdays and came home and wanted to make invitations – so she did!

6. What do you think about the statement that young children learn just as much at home as they do in school?

5. ท่านมีความคิดเห็นอย่างไรกับคำกล่าวที่ว่า เด็กเล็กเรียนรู้ที่บ้านมากพอๆกับเรียนรู้ที่โรงเรียน

Probably more in fact as they learn huge amounts in the first year of life. This gives them the basis for continued learning experiences and can affect attitudes towards learning.

7. Should children learn different things at school than they do at home?
6. เด็กๆควรจะเรียนรู้ที่โรงเรียนในสิ่งที่แตกต่างจากที่เรียนรู้ที่บ้านหรือไม่

It is good to widen their experience but many things will be learnt at home too but in a less structured or planned for way.

8. Some people think that children learn best when school and home work closely together – do you agree? Why?
7. บางคนมีความคิดว่า เด็กๆเรียนรู้ได้ดีที่สุดเมื่อโรงเรียนและบ้านทำงานร่วมกันอย่างใกล้ชิด

ท่านเห็นด้วยหรือไม่ เพราะอะไร.

I agree! I really value the time some children give to tasks at home that reflect what has happened at school and it is great to see that the children have been engaged in their learning to want to do things at home

9. When your child is in Pre-Nursery, what sort of information would you expect their report to contain?
8. เมื่อบุตรหลานของท่านอยู่ชั้นเนิร์สเชอรีหรือK1 ข้อมูลแบบไหนที่ท่านคาดหวังจะได้รับในรายงาน

การศึกษาของบุตรหลานของท่าน

Friendships, interpersonal skills, likes, dislikes. Are they happy?!

10. Would it be beneficial if you could also contribute your knowledge of your child's learning to any reporting document?
9. หากท่านสามารถเขียนเกี่ยวกับการเรียนรู้ของบุตรหลานของท่านลงในรายงานการศึกษาได้ด้วย

จะเป็นประโยชน์หรือไม่

Perhaps if children are moving schools or indeed year groups.

11. If you need to contact your child's teacher, do you prefer to use the 'Red Book', e-mail or speak to the teacher in person?
10. หากท่านจำเป็นต้องติดต่อสื่อสารกับคุณครูของบุตรหลานของท่าน ท่านชอบที่จะใช้ สมุดสีแดง

อีเมลล์ หรือ สันทนาการกับคุณครู

Red book or in person

12. Do you ever use e-mail or the 'Red Book' to tell the teacher about something that your child has done at home?

11. ท่านใช้อีเมลล์หรือสมุดสีแดงในการบอกคุณครูเกี่ยวกับสิ่งที่บุตรหลานของท่านทำที่บ้านหรือไม่

Occasionally!

Please feel free to answer these questions in Thai if you would prefer. Completed questionnaires can be sent to Michelle Brinn at mibi@....th . Hard copies can be sent to the Pre-Nursery via your child's red book.

ท่านสามารถตอบคำถามเหล่านี้เป็นภาษาไทยหากท่านต้องการ เมื่อท่านตอบแบบสอบถามเรียบร้อยแล้ว

ท่านสามารถส่งกลับมาที่ มิเชล บรินน์ mibi@....th หรือส่งมากับสมุดสีแดงของบุตรหลานของท่าน

Appendix 5

Discussion data - strands and themes on learning and home-school communication.

Perspectives on home and school learning			
Parents not sure how to define 'Learning', questioning if this should be defined along traditional areas of mathematics and reading. (K, S, Al, V, K)	Often learning at home more seen to do with 'values', such as manners, respect. (W, An, H, C, C, H, K) This seen as being passed from family to family, though differences between mother and father's family may exist. (So)	As discussion flourished, parental expectations in Early Years expressed predominantly in terms of wellbeing and social values (such as appropriate social interaction and behaviour as well as communication). This was seen as important throughout education (S,An,W, V,K,Al,K,St,S, So, Al,V,K, P). However balance may change as children get older especially when they begin to feel more pressure from exams. (P, K)	'School' learning seen as beneficial, as it gives children opportunities that may not be available at home. (St, Al, An, Na) Home / school completely different learning environments (P)
At home, learning may be incidental and perhaps implicit whereas learning in school is more planned for and explicit. (Sa, V, K, K, P)	In a culture where many children have nannies, school learning is essential as it allows children to socialise without 1-1 adult support. (V)	Parents may rely on the school to teach certain developmental aspects due to pressures of time in busy households or the fact that the school may be better equipped/ knowledgeable (V, Al, Na)	Parents saw many changes/ developments in children since starting school, which were therefore attributed to school; not all of these were positive. (S, H)
Parents are primary role models (C) especially for family values (So, Sop).	Children learn in different ways (S, K)	Children may have more individual choice at home (N, C) and parents may have more time to listen and respect each individual choice (C, V)	Parents make very considered choices about learning and choice of school (V, So, Sop, J)
Both home and school learning changing due to technological changes (L, St, A)			

Home-school communication		
There should be a 'cross over' between home and school (K, So, Al, Na) and 'values', should be connected. This is especially important when related to acceptable behaviour (Al, Sa, So, Sop)	Parents would love to know more about their children at school, especially at the very start of their school life. (S, H, An, V, C, W).	The method of communication between home and school is unimportant as long as communication takes place (H)
Communication may encourage consistency of expectations in	There are multiple influences on children and that children adapt to	Successful home-school strategies used in the Foundation Stage may

areas such as behaviour and this was perceived as beneficial (St, L, A, Al, W)	different situations, but adaptation may be more effective if there is some overlap. Making links between these experiences may help foster greater learning (A, A, C, C, E, E, V, N, P, V)	be beneficial for children and parents further up the school (K, K)
Many successful home-school communication strategies already being used within the Foundation Stage (K, E, C). Positive comments were made about the various strategies used to inform parents of school learning, including red books (see other table), LJs (see other table) blogs (S, An), photograph books (K, Al), introductory meetings (W), newsletters (K), parental and nanny workshops (P, Sop, So), open mornings (St, Sop, So)	Curriculum and other information possibly unfamiliar to parents is best done through relevant examples (K) (Sop, So). Inclusion of songs, stories and practical strategies beneficial (St, L). However, much written information forgotten. (L). Face to face strategies may be more beneficial to impart important information than written information (St, C, E).	Contradictory views expressed by parents e.g. - open mornings should be used as potential to 'teach' parents and model what they do not know (Sop) open mornings are simply a participatory experience (St) Red books should contain only day to day admin (S, W) red books should be personalised commentaries on a child's learning and personality (Sa, Al, K, P)
Enhancing methods of communication may create inequalities between contributions for some children (P) with potential consequences for self-esteem (P) (V) However, more private sharing on information could prevent this (An)	Parents may want different things out of every communication method – is it possible to please them all and if not who should we be pleasing? (Sa, Sop, V, E)	Parents often reach out to other parents, rather than school, to confirm ideas about learning. (E, Jm, C, E, E)
Parents recognise they also have a responsibility to help their children learn but school can 'guide' and aid parents in this (Sop, Sop, Jm)	Communication from school gives background to whatever information the children bring home and enhances understanding of children's stories (J, St, K, P, E)	School can have higher expectations in certain areas than parents and knowing this may help at home (K, Sop)
Children not clearly able to articulate emotions so communication helps make sense of unusual behaviours for both parents and teachers (S, So)	Communication allows parents to 'visualise' their children's school experiences and therefore understand them more (St, S) and can create a positive feeling about their child's learning experience (V)	Communication from school enhances parental knowledge of school activities and life beyond the immediate classroom environment (Sa)
Teachers of older children (especially Secondary) may not be comfortable talking about emotional issues and emotional development with parents (V)	Cannot know too much, more info gives you more choice (V, W)	Information gives help to EAL students as parents can support (Jn, W)

Children take 'school' home a lot in their role play, this allows parents to see a child's eye view of school and support this (St, P, V)	As children get older they should take a more active role in their own learning. (An, Na, P)	School allows children to understand that multiple influences on their behaviour exist but this is not always expressed in a positive way. (Sa, Sop, So, Al)
Children do not clearly articulate their experience of school at home. However, prompts such as LJ's, photograph books and the blog help to promote discussion and involve the child and may help children reflect on their experiences. (St, L, H, J, K, K, An, P)	Sharing work from school encourages a sense of pride in children (St, J)	

Learning Journey		
Very detailed in all areas of development. (P, K, J) Very comprehensive info on child (K)	Children enjoy talking about it but don't remember the details, except in the case of the artwork, which they were very enthusiastic about. (J, K, P)	Families appreciated it but would love it if it children were more involved, as it appeared teacher dominated. (J)
Not sure how or what to contribute (K). Guidelines /clarification to aid parents contributions would be helpful (K, J)	May be too much for EAL parents (K) (Note: comment not from EAL parent.)	Excellent to show working /travelling parents exactly what is going in with their child learning. (J)
Good forum for recognising the importance of one's home language (W, Jn, N)	Parents expect it to be about social and emotional development in Nursery (Al, P)	Frequency of it coming home may lead to issues, both for children to remember and for parents to use it as a device to share home learning. (So, J)
Can become a 'pain' to fill in (J) (So) finding time becomes an issue for both parents and staff (J, St, So, K)	Good for showing aspects of development such as social and emotional development not visible at home (J, Sop)	Need to find a way to reflect more hands on learning (J, K)
If parental contributions are not recognised and reflected on by teachers then both parents and children lose interest (J, S, K)	If the teachers do not respect parental contributions the document it will just become a 'storage' file and a chore to complete rather than an integral part of the learning. (K)	

Parents as 'others'		
Some parents perceived that certain staff may not be keen to have them around (J)	Some parents expressed that they did not know as much as the teacher, thus put themselves in the role of the 'other' (Sop, W, E, Jn)	Parents do not know their children at school and the teacher is more knowledgeable than them in this area (J, Sop, Sa)
Parents see both roles as distinct (parent / teacher) more so in secondary (V, P)	Parents do not communicate with school as they do not want to seem 'pushy' this being seen by parents as a negative attribute. (Sa, K, P, W, Jn, J)	

Practical Strategies to enhance home-school communication.		
Parental workshops could be more focused on parental need, as identified either through the class parent or through the introduction parental meeting. (Sop, J, So)	Return to a more interactive 'hand on approach' within the parental workshops. Include more practical elements such as the teaching of songs / nursery rhymes etc. (So, J)	Make 'open mornings' more focused - a balance between teacher modeling and parent interaction with children. (J, St, Sop, Sa)
To prevent any elements of 'competition' emerging use the red book to make parental comments on things like the photograph books (P)	Use introduction meetings to find out more about parental needs such as, preferred method of communication, desires for support, biggest concerns, desire for specific feedback in any area. (Sop, W,)	Inform parents more fully about curriculum as a lack of understanding may prevent full involvement (So, An, Sop, J)
Encourage children to present the LJ to parents in small group during specific LJ open mornings (So, J, St, L)	Creating individual blogs (Al) or a web based sharing doc such as Evernote (An)	The introduction of a folder to transport a variety of information and 'work' between home and school, the best examples of which were selected for the LJ. (J, K)
Consciously making expectations and curriculum explicit during initial Nursery meetings and assessments (P, So, W, Jn)		

Red Communication Book		
Red book very important and well loved. It is read and scanned constantly by parents. (E, C, L, Sa, H, So, Sop, St, P, K, S, V)	Parents unsure how to use it – what to put in, what is appropriate, how much, what sort of information to include. (S, E, C)	Parents perceive that there is not a consistent use of red book throughout or even within year groups (So, Sop)
The red books are used less as the children get older and are missed by parents. (S, So, St)	The fact that there is not a response in the red book does not mean that they are not appreciated (St, V)	Parents are afraid to 'overuse' the red books as they perceive that this might make them seem as 'pushy parents' (K, K, W, Jm, S, J, P)
Having a previous relationship with the teacher may lead to a more relaxed and more regular use of the red book. (L, St)	Finding out what parents want from the red book, may be effective it may involve more effort in the beginning, but may prevent wasted effort later on. This may also prevent overloading parents with too much unnecessary information. (Sop, Sa)	

Appendix 6

Dear Parents

25th January 2012

As some of you may be aware, I am currently undertaking doctoral studies with the University of Bath, UK. I am at the stage of the research inquiry for my thesis, and have an interest in examining how we can improve our knowledge of children's learning at home through the use of our home-school communication, including the Learning Journey, red contact books and e mail.

I would like to analyse some of the Learning Journeys, e mails and contact books in detail and would like your permission to do so. The examples would be chosen at random and I would not be looking at individual children but rather at the type of information given by the teacher and the types of responses given by the parents. This may include analysis of whether the information is procedural or educational and which format teachers and parents prefer to use – for example photographic evidence or detailed description. This would be done to help us find the best ways to communicate our knowledge of your children to you.

At all times during the study, I will be working within the guidelines for ethics and confidentiality of the University of Bath and, although the information collected will also be fed back to members of the Primary Leadership Team, all contributions will remain anonymous, for example cited as Participant 1. The examples chosen may be copied in order to ensure accurate recollection, but any copies will be kept in a password protected folder and will be accessed only by me.

I feel that this is a very exciting study, and I hope that the outcome will improve our understanding of your child's learning both at school and at home. I would be very happy to disclose the result of my finished study to any interested parties. I hope that you feel able to contribute to this study by giving me permission to use examples of your communication with me. **Please return the reply slip below to inform me of your decision.**

If you require any more information prior to making your decision, please do not hesitate to contact me at mibi@...ac.th, or speak to me in person.

Thank you for your attention and continued support for my research.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Brinn

Reply Slip:

I give my permission for

- my child's Learning Journey,
- my child's red contact book,
- my e mails to be included within this study.

I do not wish to be included within this study. **(Please delete as appropriate)**

Child's name:

Child's class:

Parents signature:

Appendix 7

Dear Colleagues

January 25th 2012

As most of you are aware, I am currently undertaking doctoral studies with the University of Bath, UK. I am at the stage of the research inquiry for my thesis, and have an interest in examining how we can improve our knowledge of children's learning at home through the use of our 'Learning Journey'.

In order to understand how parents utilise our Learning Journey, it is crucial to explore how parents have been informed about this artefact and explore its contextual development over the past year. As such I would like to undertake an analysis of meeting minutes, e mail communication and presentations to parents etc that focus on the Learning Journey. These will be used to tell the narrative development of the Learning Journey within our particular context. As respected colleagues, I would like to seek your permission to use this data.

At all times during the study, I will be working within the guidelines for ethics and confidentiality of the University of Bath and, although the information collected may also be fed back to members of the Primary Leadership Team, all contributions will remain anonymous, for example cited as participant 1. The examples chosen may be copied in order to ensure accurate recollection, but any copies will be kept in a password protected folder and will be accessed only by me.

I feel that this is a very exciting study, and I hope that the outcome will improve our understanding of children's learning both at school and at home. I would be very happy to disclose the result of my finished study to any interested parties. I hope that you feel able to contribute to this study by giving me permission to use examples of your communication or presentations, meeting minutes of which you were involved. **Please return the reply slip below to inform me of your decision.**

If you require any more information prior to making your decision, please do not hesitate to contact me at mibi@...ac.th.

Yours sincerely,
Michelle

Reply Slip

I give my permission for

- documented discussions (including e mails),
- meeting minutes, policy documentation
- parental presentations, letters

specifically discussing the development of the Learning Journey, to be included within this study.

I do not wish to be included within this study. **(Please delete as appropriate)**

Name

Signature

I understand and agree that any information collected may be used as part of the Doctoral Thesis of Michelle Brinn and within ...School, albeit anonymously.